Buddha

A Pictorial History of His Life and Legacy

J. Auboyer / J. L. Nou / H. Dumoulin / Introduced by Huston Smith

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"Nowhere have the visual and the verbal entered into more effective counterpoint in telling the Buddha's story than in the pages of this magnificent volume." *–Huston Smith*

BUDDHA

A Pictorial History of His Life and Legacy
by Jeannine Auboyer
Foreword by Huston Smith
Epilogue by Heinrich Dumoulin
with 129 color photographs by Jean-Louis Nou

This is the story of the Indian prince who, over 2500 years ago, abandoned a life of luxury and pleasure to find the one imperishable thing in this evanescent and pain-filled life. In mid-life, at the end of a long spiritual search, Siddhartha Gautama underwent the experience in which he became the Buddha, or "The Enlightened One." Thereafter Sakyamuni, as he came to be called, spent forty years of wanderings, during which he preached the Good Law and the Four Noble Truths and founded a community of disciples. The final chapter of the book deals with the development and spread of Buddhism, with its various schools and countless adherents, up to the present day.

The photographs, taken expressly for this book, richly complement the text in all its historical, religious, and artistic dimensions. There are the places associated with the Buddha during his lifetime: the foothills of the Himalayas and the cultural centers of the Ganges river basin. There are the commemorative monuments and the great Buddhist temples and monasteries. And, finally, there is the legacy of painting and sculpture which depict deities and bodhisattvas, Jataka tales and episodes from the life of the Buddha.

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Jacket illustrations
Front: Head of the Buddha, Ajanta, Cave I, 6th century
Rear: Ritual bathing in the Ganges River

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEAN-LOUIS NOU

FOREWORD BY HUSTON SMITH

EPILOGUE BY HEINRICH DUMOULIN

JEANNINE AUBOYER

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A Pictorial History of His Life and Legacy

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CONTENTS

Foreword by Huston Smith 7

The Social and Religious Situation in India in the Sixth Century B. C. and the Buddha's "New Way" 11

The Conception of the Buddha, His Birth, and His Renunciation of Court Life 21

Illustrations 1—31
The Birth of the Future Buddha—The Court Life of Prince Siddhartha 35

From the Great Departure to the Illumination 73

Illustrations 32—75
The Great Departure of Prince Siddhartha—His Life as an Ascetic—The Illumination under the Bodhi Tree—The First Preaching of Buddha Sakyamuni 87

The Preaching of the Buddha and the Founding of the Buddhist Community 143

Illustrations 76—115
Buddha's Wanderings as Preacher of the "Good Law" and the "Four Noble Truths" Conversions and Miracles 157

The Road to the Parinirvana 213

Illustrations 116—129
Buddha's Death and Entrance into Parinirvana—Commemorative Monuments and Reliquaries 229

Evolution and Expansion of Buddhism 249

Epilogue by Heinrich Dumoulin
Encounters Between Buddhism and Christianity 259

FOREWORD

We live on a crazed planet at war with itself: "the hood of the cobra is spreading; humankind watches in frozen fear hoping against hope it will not strike" (Indira Gandhi). But if we can contain and then dismantle the bomb, we might awake to a twenty-first century that would look back on our present one as a nightmare. Social problems would remain, but spiritually we may be on the brink of a new era. And if power flows from spirit to matter more than the other way around, reduced hatred, greed, and ignorance could produce a more rational approach to social problems which, while riddled with these "three poisons," have no solution.

The mushrooming of new religions and the attention that Asian outlooks are receiving in the West are surface signs of change, but more important are the shifts that are occurring in the Western worldview itself. Science is changing. It is showing Newtonian matter to be but the frozen surface of a nature which, at its torrential source, is ghostlike, "empathic" in the degree of its responsiveness, and in important ways ineffable. And along with these changes within science, our attitude *toward science* is changing; we are maturing in our capacity to see it in perspective. Impressed by its technology and power-to-prove, we slipped for a century or so into looking to science for the last true word about everything. Now we see that there are things – they tend to be the higher, more important things – about which it can tell us nothing. This frees us to look seriously to other sources of knowledge that take those things into account.

Preeminent among these other sources are the world's great religions which, whether we regard them as divinely revealed or as representing the cumulative experience of the human race, deserve to be called the Wisdom Traditions. The degree to which their independently arrived at teachings converge lends credence to their content; meanwhile, important differences among them suggest that they have focused – specialized, we might say – on aspects

of the human problem that were particularly important for their respective civilizations.

Among the Wisdom Traditions, Buddhism became the first *world* religion by proving its ability to cross ethnic boundaries and speak importantly to multiple civilizations. It is unique in the degree to which it couches its message in psychological terms, but what it says in those terms is universal. It tells us that our destiny and final cause is a condition, *nirvana*, that exceeds all telling but is completely fulfilling. Currently we are screened from that condition by ignorance and the resultant demandingness of our finite selves. The art of life, therefore, consists in overcoming the fundamental human disability of egoism.

Only now is the West beginning to appreciate the subtlety of the psychological analysis on which the Buddha based the conclusions just summarized, but the conclusions themselves are simple. Our minds can assimilate them at a sitting, but for our lives to be adequated to them – brought to the point where they exemplify the truths in question – requires a turning at the deepest center of the self, which, Buddhists say, takes lifetimes. That one life perfected that turning – the life of the Buddha himself, who was born with everything and gave it all up for others—is encouraging to know, but that was centuries ago. So art is needed, preeminently an art that prolongs the example and encouragement the Buddha's life affords. Enter this book. Its account of the Buddha's life is satisfying in itself, but the way it embellishes that account with the finest visual renderings of that life is truly remarkable. Nowhere have the visual and the verbal entered into more effective counterpoint in telling the Buddha's story than in the pages of this magnificent volume.

The function of sacred art is to make easy what is otherwise difficult. The point of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and mandalas that adorn these pages is not to decorate and please; it is to elevate and transform. Mandalas are empowering diagrams; bodhisattvas are guides for the journey toward buddhahood that they are embarked on. As for the Buddhas themselves, if bodhisattvas are Buddhas-in-the-making, Buddhas (in the larger Mahayana tradition) are Buddha-makers, dedicated to raising all sentient creatures to the estate they have achieved. These are the working concepts underlying the art this book assembles; the miracle is the way that art effects the changes that concepts only counsel. It does so by conforming its forms to the contours of spirit. Thereby those forms become apertures through which spirit pours to inspire us (literally in-spirit us by letting us "breathe spirit in"), if we have the will to grow and eyes to see. And if we do in-spirit the divine, then easily, with scarcely the slightest effort on our part, we are carried ahead of ourselves. Our humanity is enlarged by the spirit that has entered it, and with this largeness of heart we find it natural to act compassionately. For of all life we are then a part, not apart.

But one counsel is useful. Ideally this book should be "seen through" in the way its reproductions allow us to see, through them, the Invisible they announce. Specifically, we should see through, then beyond, the pages of this book to restore its paintings and icons to the temples and hillsides from which photography has abstracted them. Instead of think-

ing of the objects as having been brought to us, we should place ourselves in the position of pilgrims who have journeyed to see them. We have come a great distance to see, not objects of art, but the Reality to which they point. We have heard words that at some deep level of comprehension struck us as true; now we are privileged to see those words in visible form. The images are of ones awakened, and for our awakening, we who are still asleep. There is no understanding here without assimilation. To understand is to be reborn.

Huston Smith

THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN INDIA IN THE SIXTH CENTURY B.C. AND THE BUDDHA'S "NEW WAY"

He who is known the whole world over under the name of Buddha actually existed. His historical existence has been proven, a fact that gives his character and his doctrine an irrefutable consistency. He was born during the second half of the sixth century B. C. in the Himalayan foothills in what is now Nepal near the Indian border. His father was a chief of the Sakyas—a small tribal republic—and his given name was Siddhartha, while the family name was Gautama (Pali: Gotama). It is also known that he was about eighty years old when he died after having preached for more than forty years in the area of the middle basin of the river Ganges. These are well-established facts, even though not all the scholars are in agreement as to the precise dates of his birth and death. However, this is of little importance, since they can be pinpointed within a margin of a few years. Indian tradition gives the dates as 556–483 or 478 B. C., and the twenty-five-hundredth anniversary of his birth was solemnly celebrated in 1956 at an international assembly in New Delhi.

What was happening around the year 556 in the world such as it was then known? In Rome, an Etruscan town was built (ca. 550-500). Most importantly, the Achaemenidian Persians seized power in Iran in 559, in an area that is relatively close to India. While at the other end of Asia, around 550, the philosopher Confucius established in China a school of thought that has survived until the present time.

In India itself, four large kingdoms had been established in the northern part, sharing among themselves the Gangetic plain: Kosala and Magadha on either side of the river's middle basin and Vatsa and Avanti at the south of the river.

It was in Magadha that the Buddha was most active during his entire lifetime. And the kings of Kosala and Magadha are well known to us: the king of Kosala was called Prasenajit, while that of Magadha was Bimbisara. They were quite different. The former barely concerned himself with the affairs of his kingdom, remaining indifferent to the marauding bandits and the tribal chiefs and vassal kings who held it ransom. He was only interested in long conversations with "holy men," thinkers, and ascetics of all kinds.

Bimbisara of Magadha was quite different: an entrepreneur, organizer, good and strict manager, he traveled tirelessly in his kingdom, surveying the network of roads that he caused to be paved along the main highways, and annexing several neighboring principalities including Anga with its capital of Champa, a business center and active river port.

His son Ajatashatru, impatient for the throne, deposed Bimbisara and led his army immediately against Prasenajit; being victorious, he attached Kosala to Magadha and, shortly after the death of the Buddha, also conquered the territory of the tribal confederation of the Vrijis farther north. Thus did Bimbisara and Ajatashatru establish the largest and most powerful kingdom of the Ganges area.

Such was the political context during the lifetime of the Buddha. But there was another factor that might not have escaped the attention of the sovereigns of northern India: the attempted territorial expansion in the East of Cyrus the Great, emperor of Achaemenidian Persia (558-30 B. C.). It seems that he had already conquered what is today Pakistan. And his once-removed successor, Darius I (522-486), seized a large part of Panjab in 517-16.

It is, however, doubtful that those events had much influence on the daily life of the people of northeastern Indian. They were certainly more concerned with something closer to them: the socio-religious structure locking them up in a vicious circle, as we shall see further on.

In order to understand this, we must now describe that structure, going back to its origins. We shall then see the consequences during the sixth century B. C. for social groups as well as for individuals. And the goal toward which the Buddha strove will become all the clearer.

In fact, the process started in India long before the time of the Buddha, during migrations that were probably very large but distributed over long periods of time, and coming—it is thought—from eastern Europe (Caucasus?). They were described under the general name of *Arya* ("white people"). On their way, those people on a quest for inhabitable territories are said to have spent a long time in Iran.

Two or three centuries before the birth of the Buddha, that is ca. 900-800 B. C., the Aryan invaders spread out on the Indo-Gangetic plain, imposing their Indo-European language, Sanskrit, which was connected with Greek and Latin, and propagating their beliefs as well as their laws. This did not happen without clashes, nor without assimilation, for local traditions (particularly the phallic cults) and certain foreign elements can be discovered in the religious and literary culture of that era.

From that time on, society is divided into classes and the family is the basic component. The chief of the tribe is called *raja* (a word akin to the Latin *rex*) and his role is above all that of a warrior: he leads the nobility, assisted by a general. And the chief of the priests, thanks to magic and sacrifice, ensures the prosperity of the clan in peacetime, and its victory in time of war.

Two other classes are to be found: the common people and those who live on the lowest rung of the social iadder, either because of their dark skin (the autochtons) or because they have committed "ritual" faults. Those classes are known under the name *varna,* which means "color."

That classification can be broken down into four large castes: in order of importance, the priests, or Brahmins *(brahmana);* the warriors and nobles, or *Kshatriya;* the peasants, or *Vaisya;* and the serfs, or *Sudra.* In itself such a hierarchy is not original and other civilizations have had similar or analogous structures. However, what happened in India is very characteristic of the tendencies that have specifically been hers throughout the evolution of her culture: on the one hand, a progressively stronger inclination toward categorical and hierarchical classification; on the other hand, a conservatism that slows down the rhythm of evolution, accumulating new factors without, however, eliminating old ones, and that in certain cases leads to sclerosis or a dead end.

Social structure followed these trends. Insofar as it is possible to analyze it through the medium of the Vedic texts—the fundaments of society, of religious life, cults, and popular traditions—the four basic castes perpetuated themselves, but they also became more and more diversified and the interdicts setting up walls between them only became stronger and more numerous in the course of time.

If there had only been barriers between the four social classes in the Vedic era, this could have been alleviated by compromises or mixed marriages or even canceled through violent clashes. But the situ-

ation was not that simple because social classification was in fact an integral part of the *Veda*, "Knowledge" or "Science per se"; it was not a social matter, but essentially a religious and moral matter connected with the entire philosophical system of cosmology that had been erected by the Brahmins, or priests, sole keepers of that "Knowledge."

Thus, what first seemed to be only a kind of social fact became little by little a prison. These were not classes, which could still have communicated with one another while observing certain rules or receiving the benefit of tolerance. In the sixth century B. C., they are castes in which one can either have full access to the Veda or be ritually barred from it. For being born within one caste or another cannot be due to blind chance; their very hierarchy, connected to a more or less developed knowledge of the Veda, is the result of a mechanism that is the basis of all the metaphysical and philosophical researches of the religious movements of India—including, of course, those of Buddhism.

Around the beginning of the sixth century B. C., the body of Brahmanic concepts (a phrase coined by Western scholars on the basis of the word *brahmana,* for "priest") had been erected: the universal order is identified with the *dharma,* meaning at the same time a statute, a law, ethics, and religion—the Veda being the source for it all. The divine world coexists with the earthly world and communicates with it, being ruled by very similar laws: there are divine classes and a divine hierarchy, just as is the case on earth among animals, men, minerals, and so forth.

All of this is based on a fundamental belief (which is still extant): the "transmigration" *(samsara)* of souls, the latter having the same essence as the universal soul. Or, to simplify, the individual "self" *(atman)* was considered as a tiny particle of the universal "Self" and its only goal was to return to this Self by progressively shrinking during successive rebirths (reincarnations) the sum of evil deeds committed during those lives. This is what is described under the name of *karma* ("act"). The ultimate goal being salvation *(moksha):* namely, the end of the transmigration of the soul.

And here is where everything becomes complicated. For, in order to obtain salvation, that is, liberation, one must, from rebirth to rebirth, decrease the number of evil deeds accumulated during anterior lives, and build during the present life a capital of good deeds.

What was, in the eyes of the Brahmins—through the medium of Veda—an evil deed? Many things, indeed, with a priority given to ritual faults, even if the latter were caused by a certain ignorance or negligence or even absentmindedness. Morality had a relatively secondary role even though the Brahmanic texts had actual inventories of morality. Many of those would seem surprising to us: to pass between a Brahmin and the sunlight by brushing him with one's shadow when one belongs to an inferior class is a serious fault. Why? Because this simple brushing "pollutes" the priest and compels him to purify himself. To molest or kill a cow, an animal that is venerated because it is supreme as a source of food—though not sacred, as Westerners claim—is also deserving of severe punishment.

The sum of his good and evil deeds will give to the individual a destiny of which he is the master if he is aware of it: either he will be reborn in his present caste, ascending or regressing socially within its framework; or, in the best of cases, he will be reborn in a superior caste, inching forward toward

salvation if he continues improving his karma. Or conversely, in case of grave faults, he will regress toward inferior castes; in the worst of cases, he will be sentenced to a birth in the animal kingdom, even in the vegetable or mineral one, which will considerably lengthen the number of lives that will finally enable him to break samsara, this merciless chain that is quasi-perpetual, symbolized in fact by a wheel in constant motion.

Besides the latent feeling of guilt that is nurtured in the individual, this theory shifts the problem out of perspective: "good" deeds are not necessarily "moral," just as "evil" deeds are not necessarily "immoral." While the inventory of good and evil changes in the course of the centuries, the concept itself remains an inescapable weight, all the more crushing if one belongs to the low castes.

All this mechanism, firmly maintained by the Brahmins, became sclerotic in the course of time, the partition between the castes became harder and harder; the social graduation within each one of them became diversified and more acute. So that it was possible to notice, around the beginning of the sixth century B. C. the probable existence of an intellectual, emotional, and moral rejection of a part of the Indian population, especially in the castes barred from the Veda—namely, barred from achieving salvation for an incalculable period of time.

This could only lead to the quest for a remedy to such a despairing state of affairs. And most of the philosophical movements of that time proposed systems attempting to solve the matter. Some advised the path of asceticism, others that of reasoning, others yet the way of devotion. None of them seemed to have grasped the real acuteness of the situation. For it is also possible, though we have neither proof nor echo, that the Indian social fabric had reached a certain level of saturation that would have been translated into a demand for social liberation as well as mental appeasement through the suppression of the drama in which the individual was immersed.

If we try to imagine ourselves in the social and religious context of that time, with all its interdicts and especially within the framework of daily life in a low caste, we are quickly convinced that our own karma (the balance of the deeds of anterior lives) will never enable us in this present life to progress sufficiently to reach the social and religious status permitting access to salvation. Which means that one will know in the next life the same incapacity, not because one does not apply all his energy to diminish his past evil deeds, but because one life is not enough to accumulate "good" deeds permitting access to the liberating passage. There are too many steps to climb, too many traps to avoid, too many humiliations and misunderstandings to suffer, even if one remains meekly within the human condition in which one was placed; and this is not through an injustice of fate, but through one's own faults during a whole past that one has forgotten, but the circumstances of which are explained (together with their consequences) by people who are impressive, learned, infallible, as it were.

It is probably because the intransigence of the Brahmins (who, let us remember, were priests and constituted the dominant caste) had a crushing effect on the physical and spiritual daily life of the lower castes that the quest of the Buddha unfolded. This is all the more remarkable in that he himself belonged by birth to the caste of the nobles (Kshatriya), right below that of the priests, though very powerful because it maintained, like the former, the cosmic order, or dharma. His action appears as a

peaceful revolt against a state of facts—while taking into account the context of his time. It is obvious that philosophical commentaries did not reach the mass of the people and that ascetical exercises were beyond the capacity of the most underprivileged of society. It was necessary, in order to bring an efficacious remedy to the general malaise, to innovate and therefore to propose a new way, to try and lessen the anguish created in each individual by the weight of karma, to restore a certain hope in the future (the rebirths), to make the supreme goal closer, namely: the end of samsara.

How?

In a manner that is at the same time very Indian and very original. The Law (dharma) taught by the Brahmins is replaced by the Buddhist dharma (Pali: *dhamma*), namely: the truth discovered by him and by the "Buddhas of the past" during their respective spiritual Awakenings, and preached by them and by their disciples during their lives. This *dhamma* is also called *Saddhamma,* "the Good Law" or "the True Law," the one that found its expression in the (oral) teaching of the Sakyamuni Buddha, demonstrating the true structure of things out of which the principles of salvation evolve.

Contrary to what happens in the Brahmanic environment, this is neither a new religion nor a specific sect, but essentially another way to break samsara, by drawing on a rule of life, an ethics, a morality, based on the reflection of the Buddha and the deep meditation that led him to Enlightenment, or *bodhi,* the circumstances of which will be described in the second chapter. He does not claim to be a god. He is only "the one who shows the way." And the way that he has discovered is more important than his own person because it spreads and acts independently of his physical presence.

This was done in the most efficient and direct manner among socially heterogeneous people who were illiterate in their majority: through preaching. Preaching himself, the Buddha was careful to teach the Law to his disciples, commanding them to spread it far, wherever they could go.

What then is this Way that the Buddha discovered and that he wants to communicate to all? It is based on the "Four Noble Truths" *(aryasatya):* (1) Any object of attachment is pain: birth, old age, illness, death; union, separation, desire. (2) Desire, pleasure, craving, lead to pain, stoke its fires, and keep it burning. (3) The end of suffering is reached through the total suppression of desire, leaving no room for it in the depths of behavior. (4) Through this way, one reaches right understanding, right thought, right action, right livelihood, right concentration, and so on.

Through its strictness and austerity, this rule is fundamentally opposed to the automatism of the Brahmanic system which weighs good and evil deeds and loads each individual's karma with their unequal sum, and this in the inexorable framework of castes and ritual. Even though we are simplifying things to the extreme here, it cannot be doubted that the Way preached by the Buddha has a liberating goal of morality and faith, addressing itself directly to each individual whatever the circumstances of his birth happen to be.

Once he has demonstrated this "chain of causalities" (desire causes suffering, etc.), the Buddha shows a way to undo its links one by one, then to reach the ultimate goal, which is the definitive interruption of samsara. Conceived as two phases of time, it is first *nirvana,* the truth about the destruction of suffering, attained by those whom we would call saints; at the ultimate stage, it is *parinirvana,*

attained only by those who have totally destroyed in themselves desire, and thus suppressed any cause of rebirth.

The way is long and arduous, but not impossible; the goal is remote but not inaccessible. And this is for any individual without distinction as long as he is resolved to go through each stage, guided all along by the teaching of the Buddha. The latter has three elements: morality, concentration, and wisdom.

Morality is common to all individuals, but has more numerous and more rigorous demands for those who are accepted in a Buddhist community than for those who live in the world, and all the more so for the people who are progressively promoted in the religious hierarchy. This morality is based on a conscious and intentional abstention from any action or behavior that can harm another person: murder, theft, forbidden love, lying, calumny, insult, idle talk, craving, meanness, expression of false opinions (contrary to the teaching of the Buddha).

Concentration *(samadhi)* is a more advanced stage; it is akin to the exercises known and practiced by the Indian ascetics *(yogin)*. The Buddha himself practiced it, but he voluntarily restricted it to a technique controlled by a master, the purpose of which being, by centering the thought on one point and excluding all objects of distraction, to reach mental quietude.

Through concentration, one reaches meditation that goes deeper and deeper. For those who succeed in progressively understanding the law of causality—namely, the link of causes and effects—and in detaching themselves from it by extinguishing in themselves craving or desire, recognizing the transitory and independent nature of the "self," the conclusion is nirvana, the destruction of suffering, the breaking of samsara.

Of course, it is not possible to reach this goal in an easy, quick, and unaided way. The basic morality, no matter how excellent it may be for each individual, is only the starting point of a spiritual progression; it is not innate but is the fruit of teaching. The latter, communicated by the Buddha to his disciples, is primordial, principal, determinant. In conformity with the mental habits of the Indians, all the cases, all the means, have to be studied at length and explained in detail. The doctrine must be communicated at the intellectual level of the one who wants to learn: the canonical texts are often written as dialogues in which the disciple asks a question to which the master replies, developing it to its conclusion. To this literary "summa," which is quite extensive and is posterior to the *parinirvana* of Sakyamuni, written in Sanskrit or Pali, but kept as close as possible to the line of teaching as preached by the Master, one must add tales and parables concerning his anterior lives *(jataka)* with a more popular tone, which have been abundantly used by the illustrators of Buddhism, as can be seen in this volume.

Having elaborated a doctrine, which he had conceived as a balanced and not excessive one—what he called the Middle Way—he exerted himself in structuring its transmission in a practical and durable manner. To this end, he established a community *(sangha)*, grouping lay faithful *(upasaka)* male and female, and the monks *(bhikshu* or, in Pali, *bhikkhu)*, who are the Buddhists par excellence, those who will be able to attain spiritual concentration, and the ultimate stage of nirvana.

It is obvious that the monks are the very backbone of the system, since the lay people have duties toward them but have not yet attained a sufficient level of learning or practice to aspire to ordination. In fact, the Buddhist community includes four "assemblies": the mendicant monks, the nuns, the lay brothers, and the lay sisters. It is interesting to note that the Buddha hesitated before accepting nuns and sisters—insofar as they actually were accepted in the Buddhist order of his time.

Admission to the community is not conditioned by caste membership even though it seems that the Buddha showed some partiality to noble young men such as himself. Criminals and sick people are not admitted. But membership does not necessarily last until old age or death; a monk can return to the lay state at any given time.

In modern times, this has led, in the predominantly Buddhist countries, to the phenomenon of children entering the convent at age eight to ten for a limited period of time and of adolescents or adults spending a year or two in religious life. Entering the order is not a definitive commitment; one can leave it and even return later on.

Since its foundation, the order was a mendicant one: having accepted at the moment of their ordination to take what we call the "vow of poverty," the monks can only live on donated food, for which they must go begging from house to house every morning.

And here is where the faithful who remain in the world have a part to play, a part that is essential to the survival—and the prosperity—of the monasteries. Venerating the "Three Jewels"—the Buddha, the Law, and the Community—they practice the five essential observances, listen to preaching, give alms to the monks in the form of food, clothing, and flowers. The richest among them, including princes and the king, donate grounds, buildings, village revenues. Often the patrons are women. In compensation, as it were, and through the merit that has always been attached to donations—*dana*—in India (as was recently the case with *Vinobhava*), lay people acquire merits that will be credited to them at the time of their future births.

48 As to the monks, they first have to undergo a novitiate of variable duration and cannot be ordained before the age of twenty. Clad in a yellow cloak that is seamless and draped around their body, hair and beard closely shaven, they appear before a chapter of ten senior monks. Their monastic possessions are meager: a bowl for alms, three garments that make up their daily dress, a razor (to keep their tonsure in good shape), a darning needle, a filter to purify their drinking water, a (beggar's) stick, and a toothpick. They first have to answer questions about their identity: name, age, and connection with a master. Then they must express three times their wish to receive ordination. If their wish is accepted in silence by the chapter that represents the community, the monks are integrated in the community and obey its rhythm of life.

Every morning, they leave the monastery, walking in single file—the eldest leading—in silence and with their eyes cast down. Going from house to house, they collect in their bowls rice balls and vegetables as they are offered, without looking at the donor, especially if it is a woman. Their quest must end early, for they have to return to the monastery and eat their meal before noon at the latest. This is their only meal of the day. Pious people live in the same way. Their food consists of rice "bread," and

their drink of water; the use of spirits is forbidden. Meat and fish are banned only if the monks know or suspect that the animals have been slaughtered for their intention. Butter, oil, honey, and sugar are only permitted to sick monks and serve as medications.

After some hesitation, the Buddha permitted women to form their own communities. They had to remain novices for a minimum of two years; then, to be ordained, had to submit to six interdicts instead of the four required of the monks, appear first before a chapter of nuns, then a chapter of monks, and observe a more severe discipline than the male religious. The rest of their life followed the same rhythms and the same interdicts: they were forbidden to look at themselves in a mirror or a bowl filled with water, to dress up, to use cosmetics or perfume, to take part in dancing, singing, or music playing. It goes without saying that chastity was an obligation for both sexes.

As soon as the monastic order was established, the monks had to become itinerant preachers, without any stable residence during the dry season and not necessarily living as a group. This is not possible during the monsoons: from June/July to October/November, torrential rains, floods, and storms not only cause a break in communications, but they deprive the monks of their audience since the latter are too busy stopping up the breaches in their own houses and fighting the bad weather that damages fields and cattle to have time to listen to preaching. Thus monastic life knows a lull of about four months, during which it takes shelter in retreats that are more or less precarious and more or less comfortable.

Since up to the present no one has been able to recover any remnant of architecture or art that could be traced back to the time of the Buddha, it would be difficult to describe those retreats. With the help of ancient literary descriptions and the most archaic figures of Buddhist iconography, we can reach the conclusion that the communities lived not far from towns and villages, that they resided according to their means in cabins, "towers" made of bricks or stones, or even in caves. The time of the monsoon was used for retreats, that is, a truly communal life with common prayers enabling each monk to follow individually and collectively the teachings of a master as well as to enjoy a period of reflection and meditation—during which came doubts, hesitations, and even contestations (verbal, to be sure, since physical violence is absolutely forbidden).

The framework of communal life before the Mauryan era (322-176 B. C.) has not been revealed to us through archeological traces; the most ancient signs of a Buddhist cult on solid materials date from the reign of Ashoka (264-ca. 230). Ashoka, the great emperor who unified the major part of the Indian territory, converted to Buddhism in the eighth year of his reign and propagated its spirit of nonviolence and benevolence through edicts that were engraved everywhere. Yet, if he did protect Buddhism, this did not prevent him from granting his support to sects that fought openly against it.

That period left us three types of buildings: the isolated pillar on top of which is a wheel or an
101 animal, while on the shaft there might be an engraved imperial edict; the monumental reliquary, in a
72 more or less funereal style called *stupa* in Sanskrit and *degaba* in Pali; monasteries *(vihara)* and cave halls *(chaitya)* that were used for meetings and the collective prayer of the communities.

The first type, called *lat* in Hindi, is somewhat ambiguous: it could have been at the same time an

imperial monument, since the wheel *(chakra)* was the emblem of a universal king, or *chakravartin,* and a Buddhist one, since the *chakra* symbolizes the teaching of the Buddha. Its usage lasted for centuries, but it was generally associated with the stupa.

The *stupa,* which probably started as a primitive tumulus, was, as early as the time of Ashoka, a building of quarrystones covered with bricks or stone plaques, with a hemispheric shape, containing a secret and walled-in receptacle protecting relics. This solid mass bears a small square building out of which peeps the staff of a parasol. This monument will spread to the entire Buddhist world; it will change, though, with time and place.

As to the monasteries and meeting halls, they were simultaneously built from the ground up and
114 dug out of rock. The latter, of course, have better withstood destructions, and the complex of Ajanta is undoubtedly the most beautiful example, decorated with admirable wall paintings (fifth to seventh centuries).

A fact worthy of notice—because it probably corresponds to the "evangelizing" purpose of the Buddhist monks and its consequence was to give India a remarkable narrative art—is that as early as the second century B. C. Buddhist monuments were decorated with ornamented low reliefs, illustrating episodes from the anterior lives of the Buddha—or episodes of his last human life—evoking them at times through symbols. There was nothing comparable in the Brahmanic art of the same period, and it seems that it was only much later that the sects of Brahmanism felt the need to illustrate their myths and erect statues. For the Buddhists, it was a means of spreading the teaching among the often illiterate masses of various nationalities: the image being the most direct and explicit intermediary.

This brought to the civilizations of the world an invaluable aesthetic contribution.

THE CONCEPTION OF THE BUDDHA, HIS BIRTH, AND HIS RENUNCIATION OF COURT LIFE

Though the historical existence of the Buddha cannot be contested, the actual circumstances of his life have not been researched in the way European, Arab, or Chinese chroniclers would have tried to do. The narrations, which have been tirelessly transmitted throughout the Buddhist world and have inspired countless sculptors and painters, are a mixture of verifiable reality and wondrous tales meant to edify the faithful. They are at one and the same time legends about and the memory of a powerful personality. They also reflect, faithfully no doubt, a society in all its complexity and durability. Lastly, they convey a message, a sermon with multiple renewals, an insistent call to morality and to the regulation of individual behavior in collective life.

The most famous text gathering these episodes is the *Lalitavistara,* which has been translated into all the major languages of the world. But it is by no means the only one. "Biographies" of the Buddha came forth just about everywhere, the oldest appearing perhaps only a century after his death, but they seem to have disappeared, while perduring in oral transmission during several centuries, with probable modifications. Narrations were also composed in China and ancient Tibet (ca. seventh century); they vary according to sect and according to language, though one must frequently note a marked concern to keep as close as possible to the "true" tradition.

It is just as interesting to see how artists have illustrated these episodes. They have generally simplified them, at times to the extent of evoking them only through symbol. Though they have produced masterpieces—for instance in Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati, Ajanta, and outside of India, especially in central Java with the famous Borobudur (ca. 850)—their purpose must be made clear to us: to make the message of the Buddha permanent and "eternal," to teach an illiterate mass for whom the image takes the place of the text, to guide the meditation of the pilgrim as he proceeds in his ritual walk.

The history of the Buddha does not start, as one would think, with his birth. For it is integrated in the law of karma and in the cycle of samsara. Which means that he lived innumerable lives before his last birth, in the animal world as well as in the human one (though he was spared the state of femininity). Those anterior lives are described in the narrations of the *jataka,* often illustrated by artists and commented upon by preachers.

Through the sum of the merits acquired from life to life, he has reached the state of bodhisattva or "apprentice Buddha" and is kept in abeyance in an ethereal place called the "sojourn (or heaven) of the Thirty-three Gods (or Satisfied)" (Trayastrimsha). There he sits, bedecked with jewels, in majesty on a throne, his two feet on the ground, at the right end of a line of "Buddhas of the past," ready to come down for the last time to the world of men through reincarnation in order to fulfill himself as well as to help them to progress in goodness and thus attain the supreme state of spiritual Awakening (Buddhahood). Let us note that since his *parinirvana* (ca. 500 B. C.), he has gone back to the file of Buddhas of the past, and that a new bodhisattva, Maitreya, is sitting at his left side, dressed as he had been, available, and waiting for the time when he will come down to earth in his turn to devote himself to the salvation of mankind. Interestingly enough, the Buddhist tradition has it that Maitreya will reincarnate himself in the West and will have a white complexion. But the study of this personage —a purely mythical one—has already received too much attention.

The future "Sage of the Sakya" was actually born. And since the intervention of the gods is always
6 necessary, his birthplace was chosen with their approval: in the hot and humid area called Tarai, kept damp by the presence of swamps, a genuine frontier linking India to Nepal at the foothills of the
2 Himalayas. Geographically it is part of Bengal, which was at that time in the forefront of the "activist" kingdoms, and which lies in the remote shadow of the rolling holy mountains where the great Hindu gods live.

Moreover, he was born in a noble and rich family, belonging to a respected clan, though not extremely famous. That family, the Gautamas, had a chief, Shuddhodana, whose principal wife was
4 Queen Maya. That dynasty ruled in their capital of Kapilavastu, in fact Piprahva, near which Führer, a German scholar, discovered in 1896 a fragment of a column commemorating the pilgrimage of Ashoka, who came there in the twentieth year of his reign to pay homage to the birthplace of the Buddha, more than two centuries after the Buddha's attainment of nirvana.

But the last rebirth of the bodhisattva of our time had to be surrounded by wonderful events. His conception was already viewed as somewhat miraculous—and the texts affirm that these circumstances had been decided in the paradise of the Thirty-three. Thus, during a night of the full moon in the rainy season, Queen Maya, lying alone on her bed, had a dream: she saw a small white elephant equipped with six tusks coming down from heaven and entering her womb. The symbol might be surprising, but is quite clear to the Indians and even more to the Buddhists: the white elephant is the
84 supreme royal and even imperial mount; it is part of the "jewels" *(ratna)* of state and of the patrimony of any universal king *(chakravartin)*. As to the three pairs of tusks, they are a reminder of one of the anterior lives of the future Buddha, to which the Shaddantajataka (*shad*= six; *danta*= tooth) is dedicated, and which is often used to illustrate and extol the bodhisattva's great charity.

After she related the dream to her husband, the latter called the Brahmins of his court for their
9 interpretation, and they confirmed what the queen herself had understood: she was going to give birth to an extraordinary man. As a consequence, all was prepared for the best possible pregnancy during the ten lunar months of its duration.

5 In due time, Maya went to her pleasure ground of Lumbini (now misnamed Rummindei), not far
7 from the capital. Feeling the labor pains, she remained standing under a tree (the nature of which is
3 often discussed in the texts) and grasped a branch with her right hand. Then the newborn baby came
9 out of her right side and was immediately caught by the Vedic gods who had hastened to come for
10 the event: the king of the gods, Indra, and the god of cosmic creation, Brahma; according to another iconography, the gods were the four guardian kings of space. Whether the former or the latter, they hold him respectfully, prone on a white cloth.

Immediately afterwards—for he was an exceptional being—the young bodhisattva stood on the ground and received a shower; the texts (which are at variance as to the chronological pattern of these happenings) all stress that it included two distinct streams: one of hot water and one of cold water. This "bath," as it is improperly called, was customary, as it has always been in all civilizations; in India it was both a purification and a matter of hygiene. But should one purify the purest of be-

ings? It seems that, in the texts as well as in the illustrations, there had been several ways of proceeding: at times, Indra and Brahma, face to face, each pour a full jar on his head; at times, this is done by two *naga,* half snakes and half humans most frequently called Nanda and his younger brother Upananda. Since in Sanskrit the word *naga* also means "elephant," sometimes two elephants, each standing on a lotus, hold in their trunk a beautiful round vase spouting two streams of perfumed water.

Several symbolic themes are to be found here. On the one hand, this solemn shower is close to the
27 washing that is one of the essential acts of the consecration of a king, called *abhisheka* and carefully described by the Sanskrit texts. This rite has survived in the Hindu tradition as well as in the Buddhist one up to our time: it was done with two conches *(shankha)* and was the prerogative of court Brahmins—the latter being, paradoxically, high Buddhist dignitaries, for instance in Thailand and Cambodia.

On the other hand, the use of elephants for the shower could also be a reference to a royal characteristic. But the theme is even more complex when we see its representations: it so happens, in fact, that the "bath" of the bodhisattva is depicted in ancient representations under the guise of a queen or female divinity sitting cross-legged on a lotus and receiving water from two jars tipped by two elephants perched on other lotuses on her right and left side. In Buddhist monuments, brief inscriptions describe her as Maya—and it has been subtly suggested that the water was not meant for her but for the sublime being she had just borne, or who was still in her womb. In Jain iconography, the picture is identical, but it refers to the birth of the Mahavina, who was almost contemporary with the Buddha. Lastly—and here is probably the origin of the symbol—the Vedic tradition interprets it as Gaja-Lakshmi, wife of the god Vishnu, under the beneficent aspect of the Mother Goddess (the lotus symbolizes birth, maternity, fecundity; water symbolizes prosperity, etc.).

After (or before, depending on the different texts) the solemn shower, the young bodhisattva takes his first steps on the ground chosen by the gods and himself for his last life in the human world. Here, too, traditions vary. At first, it was taught that the bodhisattva took seven steps from the South to the North, and then stopped, taking in the whole world at one glance. Under each one of his steps sprang a lotus. But the *Lalitavistara* preferred a more complete version, above all one more in accord with the ideas people had of the universe: in that narration he thus took seven steps to the East, then seven to the South, seven more to the West, and the last seven ones to the North. All this with prophetic commentaries. This episode corresponds to a conquest of territory—therefore of the world—making him the master of the six cardinal directions (zenith and nadir included).

4 All this having taken place, the court left Lumbini and returned to the palaces of Kapilavastu. A new episode occurs: Shuddhodana goes to present his son to "the temple of the gods"—which might very well reflect a common observance in the Buddhist culture as yet not well differentiated from the surrounding Brahmanic traditions. It also corresponds to the need of connecting the new faith with the context of beliefs that still hold priority. Not only should the newly arrived one be presented to the Vedic gods, but a venerable ascetic has to confirm the excellence of the signs that the seers had

recognized at his birth, and at the same time his horoscope has to be cast—a step that is still indispensable for any important stage of life.

10 Thus the ancient ascetic Ashita, a venerable patriarch who lived in the mountains (the Himalayas or the Vindhya Mountains, depending on the versions) decided to go to the court to give his verdict and his predictions. Shuddhodana received him respectfully because of his age and reputation. And like Simeon receiving the child Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2), the old Ashita recognized in Siddhartha the one who was, in this unique life, to give to the world the Law leading it to salvation. He detected on the body of the boy the thirty-two characteristics *(lakshana)* of great men, and foresaw that he would inevitably attain the supreme and perfect Illumination (bodhi) that would enable innumerable disciples to free themselves from the disastrous samsara.

In fact, besides the *lakshana* that Ashita had recognized, there was nothing to indicate that the young prince would not, in due time, become a worthy successor to the king, his father, who had
84 grounds to hope that he would make of him a universal monarch *(chakravartin)*, since Ashita had predicted that he would have an exceptional destiny.

His infancy is marked by a first incident: his mother, Queen Maya, dies seven days after having given birth to him. Her premature death is accepted by all the texts relating the life of the future Buddha, but the interpretations vary. No one mentions the concrete fact of frequent and common deaths among young mothers whose lives were brutally ended by childbed fever, but all kinds of reasons are given for her demise: having given birth to a Buddha, she could not experience the pleasure of love again (even conjugal love) or the joy of a future conception. Or, her part having been played, it was no longer necessary to give her another; or yet, one wanted to spare her what was inescapable: her probable heartbreak when, after thirty years, her son would renounce forever the career of a great king and take refuge in solitude and beggary.

In any event, the young prince, only son of the first wife of Shuddhodana, and thus her direct heir, was raised until the age of seven by his maternal aunt Mahaprajapati (Great Wisdom or Sapience), who was also the second wife of his father. It is obvious that the texts were not very interested in this period of his life—probably because it had to unfold according to the norms ruling the education of a nobleman, a Kshatriya, meant to prepare him for the management of a kingdom (of which he was the heir apparent), the begetting of a prince who would succeed him on the throne, and the growth of his kingdom through valiant conquests. The contrast will become all the more striking between that sheltered youth and the deliberately chosen deprivation, in due time.

It was thus important, above all, that he receive the education befitting his caste, that one of the noble warriors, as well as his future state known by the gods: a thinker and a reformer. He therefore had to learn to write and read, and at the same time to fight, to be acquainted with the martial arts, the use of weapons and archery, horseback and elephant riding, the handling of a ceremonial chariot; not to mention of course the rules of court etiquette and shades of royal behavior as well as music, song, poetic and theatrical art, even painting, all the niceties of dress, perfumes, love games and erotic life—for he would have, like all the princes, a gynaeceum—also games of chance that were at

the same time a part of daily life in all social classes and, as we shall see further, a part of the rituals of royal investiture.

There are few scenes on low reliefs and mural paintings depicting the activities of the future Buddha during his childhood and apprenticeship. He can be seen going to school in a carriage drawn by a pair of rams: but that scene is more symbolic than true to life, for in spite of his youth, the iconographers of Gandhara (present Pakistan) have clad him with the monastic cloak, and one could well imagine that the solar type connected with the ram hints at the universal personage that he will become in the future. There is another, more realistic composition in cave XVI H of Ajanta (sixth century) showing the young prince sitting in a tent with several schoolmates near a master; holding a reed in his right hand, he writes on a tablet resting on his crossed legs; on the wall behind him, hang a bowed harp and two cages, one of which holds a talking martlet *(maina)* or a small parakeet. The tent is pitched in a yard in which a banana tree is planted; there, the young students will spend their time after the lesson at archery training, wrestling, or simply watching the exercises.

However, as soon as the narrations and illustrations reach the stage of the princely life of the future Buddha, the preparation of his wedding and all that comes before his departure for the great renunciation, details are plentiful. In fact, they can be gathered either from the descriptive inventory of his anterior lives or in that of the last human life of the future Buddha, because the latter still obeys the social and worldly standards of his caste. And these are very well depicted in the texts as well as in the illustrations, perhaps because the latter were commissioned by wealthy families—and the texts, often redundant, tended to exaggerate the luxury of the palaces.

According to the conventional design, the royal palace is in the center of the capital, or the city—which has a square or rectangular plan, and is protected by an enclosure with monumental paneled gates shutting as soon as night falls and manned by security guards. Most of the time, four roads converge toward these gates, each of which faces a cardinal point, and they lead to the palace where the king resides. The whole scheme is a microcosm in which the king is like the embryo in the womb, an analogy with the god in his sanctuary at the heart of the temple. Archeological digs have lent some confirmation to this pattern, and antique illustrations add valuable details of components that have disappeared—because they were made of perishable materials—to even the occupation of the place by a crowd that is undoubtedly idealized but remains very close to the poetic and lyrical descriptions of the literary texts. Among all the schools of Buddhist art, the sanctuaries and monasteries of the Ajanta site (especially those of the Gupta and post-Gupta era, fifth to seventh or eighth centuries) give very interesting information, even if they are in fact dated ten centuries after the time of the Buddha.

Siddhartha lived in the palace of his father in the way of all crown princes: in luxury and pleasure.
22 He had already, in many anterior lives *(jataka)*, been reborn in such a privileged situation, and illus-
12 trations abound (including in this present work) that depict all the niceties of royal audiences, court
13 entertainments with female dancers and musicians, seasonal games such as the swing in the spring-
23 time, parades attending the prince or the king when he left the palace or the capital, and so on.

In the way of his peers, Siddhartha had to think about marriage according to the wishes of his father, the king, who certainly expected him to succeed to the throne. In these areas where puberty (in the eyes of the law) was precocious, the age for marriage was set at sixteen. Since the bodhisattva was agreeable, the traditional process was launched with a search for the ideal bride. She had, of course, to be perfect. Royal emissaries therefore left for the quest and combed the kingdom. After useless proceedings and many hesitations, they chose the beautiful Gopa (also called Yashodhara), who resided in the capital, Kapilavastu, and belonged to the noble tribe of the Sakya like the heir to the throne.

There remained an obligation for the latter to conquer his bride by beating competitors in a series of tests in which he was obviously bound to triumph, since he was predestined to an exemplary last life. Which is why Siddhartha subjected himself to the traditional rules of his caste, played and won a
11 game of dice, and, in a memorable tournament, was the only one able to bend a bow that no one could even lift. That feat is more frequently depicted in Buddhist iconography outside of India than in India proper, though it is carefully described in the Indian texts. It is also necessary to stress that these two rituals are part of the Brahmanic tradition.

If one looks only at appearances, nothing yet is pointing to a destiny totally different from that of a crown prince for the future Buddha: since his human birth he has followed the normal course of life for a young nobleman of his time. And he will go on. His beautiful bride, in love with him, is pampered and fawned upon. They live together for twelve years, in luxury, comfort, and pleasure, without any worry. Their life has an artistic environment depicted in the texts as well as in the works of art: dances, orchestras, relaxation in gardens, games with familiar (and useful) animals such as, for instance, some geese honking to reveal the presence of snakes.

Thus a tranquil life that King Shuddhodana is very careful to foster, because he always fears that his only son—whom we would describe nowadays as overqualified—may leave the royal life for that of renunciation or perhaps even asceticism. Such a fear was well grounded: not only did the gods see to it that the last human life of the bodhisattva would lead him to attain nirvana, the break in samsara, but also because the venerable Ashita had predicted at the time of Siddhartha's birth that he would be a universal king or a Buddha. And Shuddhodana clearly preferred that his son become a great monarch.

During the thirteenth year of their marriage (which is historically impossible to prove and humanly hard to believe), the couple have a son, Rahula, the only child whose existence has been recognized by tradition. Throughout that entire time, the future Buddha went on living without apparent difficulties. His father had given strict orders not to let him out of the palaces so that he would not have to face the sufferings of common people's lives.

Here, too, the gods were watchful. For how could a predestined being enter the way of deep reflection if he were not capable of judgment on human miseries, and if he remained not only protected against any aggression but even immune to an elementary understanding of what determines human behavior?

Then starts a struggle—uneven, needless to say—between the stubborn will and intransigence of the old king and the lucidity of the gods, who have a superior vision of the stake. They decide to foil the plans of Shuddhodana, who tries to prevent his only son from becoming aware of the inescapable phases of life, those that have always been hidden from him, not only in order to spare him a trauma but above all to keep him away from a reasoning that would unavoidably lead him to a choice opposed to his father's wishes. According to the ethics of the king, his responsibilities to his people and to the state require that he make sure that his issue keep the throne, that his son succeed him and then his grandson, Rahula, who would in due time inherit the royal power.

In spite of all, if one believes the stories, Siddhartha was sensitized to unhappiness and difficulties, though he had no personal knowledge of them, since he had been carefully protected from such. This was because he had in him the experience of his past lives and because the gods were determined to ease him along the way he had to follow in order to reach the ultimate stage, which would be the perfect example for the salvation of all believers. The texts relate an episode—happening at variable times: during his childhood, adolescence, or even just before the tournament that gained him his bride—in which he had the opportunity for a first meditation under the immovable shadow of a rose apple tree while his father and the king's ministers were performing in the open fields the ancient yearly ritual of ploughing the first furrows. This is a clear foreshadowing of his determinant meditation under the tree of the bodhi, in which, several years later, he will reach the final status of the Buddha of our time.

Be it when he became a father or before, it remains true that Siddhartha came to face the general ills of mankind, which his father had managed to hide from him, namely, old age, sickness, and death. The gods wanted to provoke him to reflection and thus to the desire to leave worldly life, easy pleasures, useless and guilty well-being. Thus when his faithful coachman, Chandaka, was ordered
6 to harness his favorite horse to the royal chariot and drive him to his pleasure grounds, the gods successively placed on his road an old man, a sick man, and a dead body. Each one of these "encounters" caused the prince to be very perplexed. Questioning his coachman, he learned that old age existed and would touch him too, since sickness, bodily pain, and physical decline were the common lot, and that in the end man was destroyed by death and decomposition.

Naturally, these revelations moved him deeply. The fourth time he left his palace, he met "a man with a shaven pate, a solitary, clad in a yellow robe." When he questioned him, the man explained that he had decided to leave home and family, in order to devote his existence to a religious life, a quiet life of good deeds, meritorious behavior, harming no being, and offering benevolence to all creatures. This, in fact, is the complete program of a Buddhist monk's life, yellow robe included.

And while Shuddhodana hastens the preparations for the consecration of his son, the latter was thinking more and more about going into a retreat in order to meditate. The truth is that such an approach was quite in conformity with the Indian and Brahmanic conception. There were four stages in the life of a man: first he was a student, then a married man and "master of a house;" later he gave up his goods and retired in a hermitage (with or without his wife, depending on her consent or lack of

such). The fourth stage, not always lived or practiced, made him end his life in renunciation and solitude. In the case of Siddhartha, one can only note that his decision will have to be made before his son Rahula becomes old enough to reach the stage of "master of a house"—he is supposed to be only an infant—while the head of a household was not meant to leave the management of his family before his eldest son was able to take his place. But it was also acceptable for him to go on retreat as soon as he had seen the face of his newborn son.

Yet he does not make his decision immediately. He still has to be convinced that his true path is really the quest for nirvana, that he will be able to guide mankind only by giving it the means to get there, and in this very process, to free itself from the quasi-perpetual circle of samsara. He also has to detach himself totally from his princely and family life, give up his comfort, his pleasures, the niceties of the court, its ease and its pomp; in brief, to give up all that has since birth prepared him to be a universal monarch *(chakravartin).* Namely, he has to renounce the good management of his kingdom, the fostering of its prosperity by performing the traditional seasonal rituals, and its preservation in the cosmic order (dharma).

It is not, properly speaking, a matter of hesitation. The texts clearly indicate that Siddhartha has already made the choice within his own depths. What he still needed was the impact that was going to hasten his religious and moral crisis, the switch that was going to trigger the decisive—and definitive—act, breaking away from worldly life, pleasures, in other words from all that his education tied to his caste had bred in him and that had been rooted in him, rather fiercely, by his father.

Deeply shaken by this last encounter with the itinerant monk, he ordered his coachman to return to the capital, Kapilavastu, mentally comparing during the drive what he had heard with his own way of life, whose emptiness had become clear to him.

Several texts, which agree on the essentials but not always on the chronological sequence of the events that were to follow, relate that Siddhartha was reflecting on the way to the city. Nothing prevented him from leaving his palace, or even his family: his lineage was ensured (though the birth of his son Rahula is given different dates), his father could still handle the good management of the kingdom for many years, his wife could supervise the education of Rahula during the first seven years of his life. He was twenty-nine years old, the age of responsibilities. Moreover, time was important if he had to make a decision, since the preparations for his consecration were proceeding and it was getting closer and closer.

On the way to his palace, he has to go through the streets of Kapilavastu. Among the crowds surrounding his chariot, he hears a woman exclaiming fervently:

Blessed the father, blessed the mother,
Blessed also the wife who has such a husband!

The thrice-repeated word evokes in him supreme beatitude, absolute and ineffable peace, and it is in a way already a premonition of nirvana.

But as soon as he regains the palace, he wants—being an affectionate and well-bred son—to advise his father of the fruit of his reflections and ask his permission to leave so as to lead for a while the life

of an itinerant monk, which was not rare in his time and remained common in later periods. At nightfall, he goes to Shuddhodana, whom he finds to be asleep. The *Lalitavistara* evokes the arrival of Siddhartha, whose body radiates light (as an aureole), standing near his father and explaining to him his desire to leave. The king, heartbroken, begs him not to do it. The prince is insistent. If he remains, will there be a guarantee that he will escape the common lot, namely, be spared old age and decrepitude, sickness and physical decline, finally death itself? It is quite obvious that the king could give him no such guarantee. Therefore, concludes Siddhartha, he has to go elsewhere in order to find the means of reaching the supreme goal. Finally Shuddhodana seems to have given him his consent, though other traditions contradict the fact, since he gave orders for the possible escape of his son to be prevented.

It had been a long conversation. The night was far gone when the bodhisattva returned to his apartments. Here, too, texts and iconographies offer two concomitant episodes, though we do not know whether one must be depicted before the other. It matters little, since they deal with the last act in the life of the future Buddha in the palace of King Shuddhodana and have the same significance: giving up the worldly life in order to follow the path of renunciation.

We will relate the most spectacular event first. Returning to his own palace after having left that of his father, Siddhartha enters his gynaeceum, where his wives are waiting for him as they do every night. In accordance with the orders of the king, their mission is to entertain him by offering a concert with songs and dances. They are the most beautiful, seductive, and expert female musicians of the kingdom. But on that particular evening, he was later than usual, the wait had seemed endless to them, it was hot and humid, and the only light came from the high candlesticks. Tired and perhaps disappointed, they had all fallen asleep; some were gracefully draped around the musical instruments held in their arms, others lazily prone on cushions, others yet were crouching with their heads on their drawn knees.

Artists who depicted that scene in ancient schools of art produced very beautiful compositions, es-
19 pecially in the work of Amaravati (second to third centuries), in which they visibly delighted in portraying the supple and harmonious shapes of the sleeping women.

It seems that the future Buddha did not share such views. In his present state of mind, he is almost morbidly repelled: these sleeping women appear to him as dead, deprived of spirit, as in some kind of prefiguration of a funeral site. The *Lalitavistara* describes the scene as he sees it. Some of these unconscious women are drooling, yawning, snoring; others, disheveled, gnash their teeth, pant, and babble senselessly. In brief, they offer the most degrading view of human nature when it is uncontrolled. The bodhisattva is deeply disgusted, and without waiting any further calls his squire, ordering him to bring his horse so that he can leave all this horror.

The other iconographic (and literary) version seems to be unaware of this episode. But, though it is more austere, the meaning is the same. Here it is as depicted especially in Gandhara (present Pakistan) and in ancient Afghanistan. When Siddhartha returns from his father, he enters the conjugal
36 room. His first wife, Princess Gopa/Yashodara, is asleep on the bed. She, too, probably fell asleep

because of the lateness of his return. Sitting on the edge of their couch, not wanting to wake her up, he waits in silence so that all can be made ready for his escape: his horse, Kanthaka, saddled, his squire, Chandaka, disposed to accompany him, and the gods alerted to give him their help in his endeavor.

The obstacles are indeed many. In the deep silence of the night, noise must be avoided at all cost. Since his father had ordered all the exits to be carefully guarded and locked, the prince is a prisoner.

> Then [says a Pali text], the bodhisattva told Chandaka: "Rouse my horse and saddle him so that no one can hear." But Chandaka—wishing to hold him back—told him: "The night is not propitious for travel. It is not good for going on a walk. Moreover, no enemies are about to attack the palace. I do not understand why I should saddle the horse tonight." The prince said: "There are great enemies, don't you know? These enemies are old age, sickness, and death. . . . Saddle my horse quickly so that no one can delay or detain us." Chandaka immediately saddled the white horse and led him into the courtyard, then he said, "The horse is ready." The bodhisattva walked up to the horse, wanting to mount immediately, but the horse neighed with great sadness. The gods feared that the departure could be delayed by difficulties and they immediately scattered the cry of the horse so that people would not hear it. Then the bodhisattva jumped into the saddle and led the horse to the small gate of the palace.
>
> (Adapted from André Bareau, *Buddha,* Paris, 1962)

And since the gods wanted the exit from the palace to be a total success, they arranged for all the watchmen and guards to be asleep. The gate opened by itself, without creaking. Four minor gods,
32 looking like pot-bellied dwarfs (the *gana*), each held the hooves of the horse so as to muffle the sound of their hitting the ground. In spite of the night sky, a parasol—symbol of dignity—is carried over the rider. A whole invisible but joyful escort goes along with him: gods and spirits throw flowers at him, a celestial orchestra gives the cadence for the ride, while the faithful squire walks in front of the horse and leads him, carrying openly the offensive weapon proper to the *chakravartin:* a ring with a sharpened edge called a *chakra,* a name heavily laden with symbolism, since it is also that of the wheel of the Law *(dharmachakra)* and since the gesture of Preaching of the Buddha will be called *dharmachakramudra.*

It does not mean that the cycle of princely life is over. Siddhartha still bears all the trappings of a royal prince: his long hair, his ornaments, jewels and sword; he rides a horse reserved for Kshatriya and the universal king. This is confirmed by the preceding details. What matters for the moment is that he escape as quickly as possible any pursuers who might rush on his trail as soon as all the guards emerge from the sleep into which they have been plunged in order to protect his flight. He rides toward the Southeast and at dawn crosses the river Anoma; then he stops.

He gets off his horse, which he will never ride anymore: this is the first symbolic act proving that after he has renounced royal power and left his family, he also ceases to belong to his caste and will enter the category of the "casteless," to which belong, in fact, itinerant monks, ascetics, and all the "holy men" that India has always highly honored.

He confirms his decision: holding his sword in one hand, and seizing his hair with the other, he cuts off his long tresses. The gods immediately take them and carry them up to the heavens. Then he gives to his squire Chandaka this very sword, all his ornaments and clothes, ordering him to bring them back to the royal city of Kapilavastu together with the horse Kanthaka. The latter bids him a moving farewell: he bends his forelegs, and kneels to lick his feet while "wetting them with burning tears."

Then he begs a few rags to clothe himself from a poor hunter—who is of course a member of the "casteless" ones—who happens to be in the area.

After the squire leaves with the horse, the bodhisattva, bereft of everything, remains alone. He will finally be able to search—against his father's will—for the solution to the fundamental problems that have been revealed to him by the "encounters" engineered by the gods. This will be described in the next chapter. However, we must first conclude the present one, giving as an epilogue some information gathered from the texts and the iconography.

While the horse and the squire were on their way to Kapilavastu, bearing the sword, jewels, clothes, and even the parasol of the bodhisattva, the palace of King Shuddhodana had awakened without having any inkling of what had transpired during the night: the gates were still closed and locked, apparently nothing had changed. Yet the alarm was promptly given: the crown prince could not be found either in the conjugal room or in the gynaeceum; his horse and squire had disappeared. Immediately alerted, King Shuddhodana ordered a far-flung inquiry; emissaries left for all points, searching the entire royal city—in vain—until the moment when those who had gone through the city gate used by the son to escape were struck by the abundance of flowers strewn by the gods on the nocturnal parade. Following this trail, they met the hunter who had supplied the bodhisattva with his new clothes, grabbed him, and would have done harm to him were it not for the arrival on the scene of Chandaka and the horse Kanthaka, on their way to the city.

The squire then gave an account of the bodhisattva's departure, and according to the instructions he had received from him, gave to the king the sword, the clothes, and the ornaments he had been entrusted to bring back to the palace. Faced with this proof of the accomplished deed, Shuddhodana and all his court gave way to tears and lamentations. Then daily life took over, and all hopes centered around the education of young Rahula, who had to be made capable and worthy to succeed to the royal throne. We shall see further what transpired.

Such, in broad outlines, is the secular stage of the Buddha's life, at least as it is depicted in the Sanskrit and Pali texts, as well as in certain ancient Chinese translations discovered during archeological digs or chance findings. In spite of variations, additions, or, conversely, gaps, and at times contradictions, the account as a whole can be considered coherent. The main stages are always stressed in an identical order.

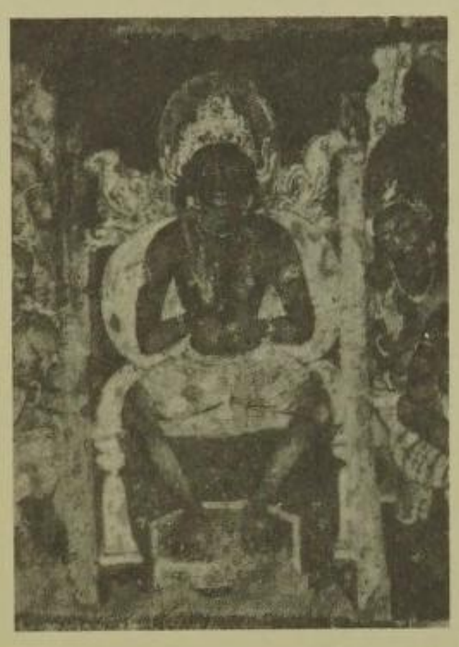
Some useful observations have to be added. First of all, even though they were written and transmitted in a Buddhist environment, these narrations enable one to perceive a Brahmanic context; for instance, the part played by the castes, their peculiarities, or certain customs, or even rituals (mar-

riage, archery, family protocol, etc.). Such a phenomenon undoubtedly corresponds to a reality, at least in the areas where Buddhism evolved quite widely, though the political and social structures remained mostly in the Brahmanic line. This can easily be verified for several eras, especially under the Shungas (ca. 185-ca. 80 B.C.) and the Guptas (ca. A.D. 320-455), when most of the rulers were followers of Brahmanism, under whose laws the schools of Buddhist art produced a wealth of beautiful masterpieces.

Many of the episodes of the legendary life of the Buddha find an echo in the accounts of the anterior lives *(jataka)* and in the edifying tales *(avadana)*, unless the opposite is true. For instance, the
–35 Great Departure of Siddhartha can be compared to that of the exiled Prince Vidhura leaving the pal-
19 ace of his father. Or the sleep of the women in the gynaeceum is also depicted in the *avadana* of King Udayana of Kaushambi.

It is in the remainder of the life of Buddha that the originality of Buddhism in comparison with Brahmanism will be more pronounced.

THE BIRTH OF THE FUTURE BUDDHA –
THE COURT LIFE OF PRINCE SIDDHARTHA



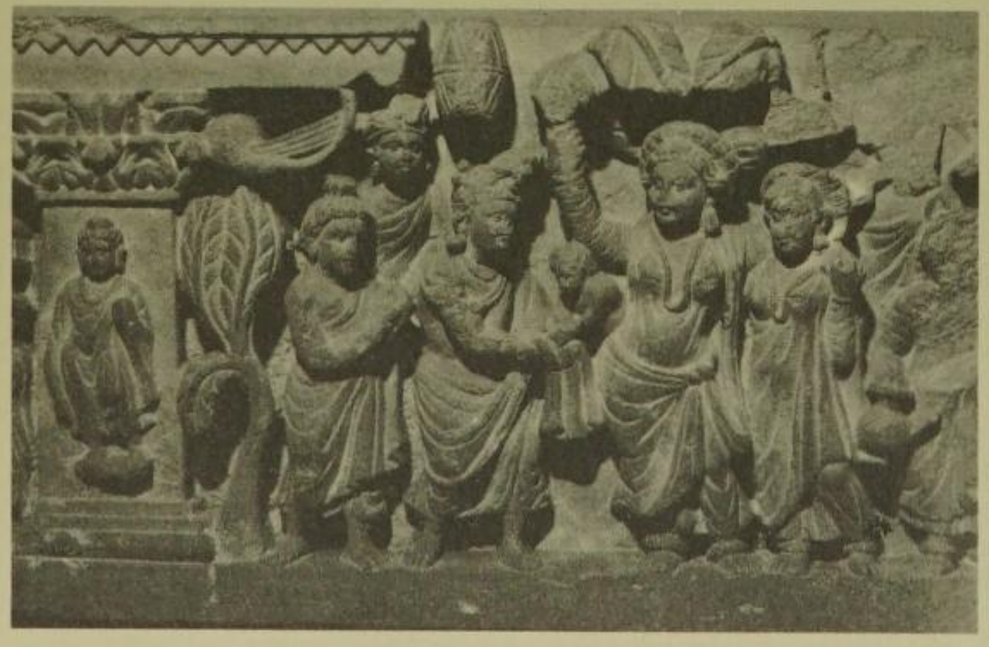
1 The Bodhisattva majestically enthroned in the heaven of the Thirty-three Gods, where he awaits his descent to his final human life on earth. Dressed in princely garb, he makes the gesture of instruction *(dharmacakramudra).* The back of his throne is decorated with two sea monsters *(makara),* whose symbolic function is that of guardians and dispensers of riches. – Ajanta, grotto II, 6th–7th century.

2 View, from the summit of Fatu-La (4100 m.), of the Ladakh chain of the Himalayas. The landscape cannot be so very different from that which the contemporaries of the future Buddha would have seen.

3 The birth of the future Buddha, Prince Siddhartha. His mother, Queen Maya, is holding onto a branch in the Lumbini garden. The newborn baby emerges from her right side. The Vedic deities Indra and Brahma receive him and lay him on white linen. The pillar-panel to the left portrays the Buddha's first steps. Slate bas-relief from Svat (Pakistan), h: 0.22 m. – Paris, Musée Guimet (AO 2,917), Alfred Foucher loan (see Fig. 10).

4 Kapilavastu, near the village of Piprahva, identified by the Archaeological Survey of India as the ancient capital of the kingdom ruled over by Shuddhodana, the future Buddha's father. The illustration shows the ruins of Ganvaria, where the palaces of the royal family of the Sakyas once stood.

5 Lumbini (now Rummindei) near Kapilavastu, where Emperor Ashoka went on pilgrimage twenty years after his coronation (c. 249 B. C.). He ordered a commemorative stupa to be erected (its remains can be seen here), in honor of the birth of Prince Siddhartha, the future Buddha, at this spot.



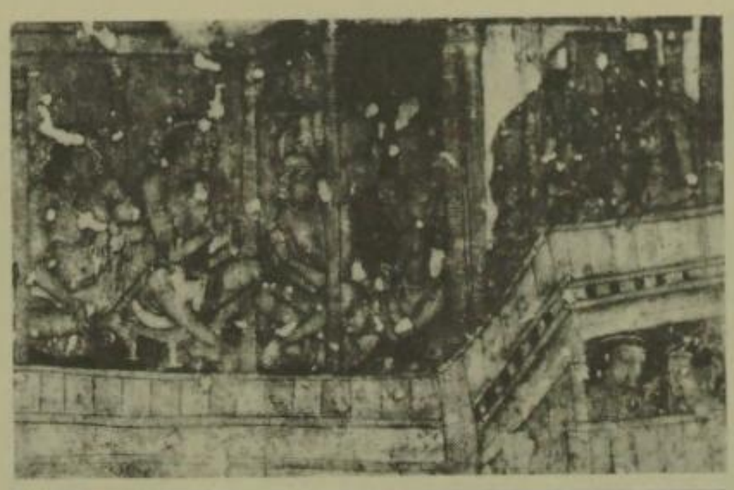
6 The region between Kapilavastu and Lumbini, where Prince Siddhartha traveled in the royal chariot with his charioteer Chandaka, and where he had his famous four "encounters" (with an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a wandering monk), which caused him to abandon his "life of pleasures" and his family.

7 Lumbini. On his royal pilgrimage Ashoka had a column erected in the park where Queen Maya gave birth to the future Buddha (Fig. 3). The place was identified in 1896 by means of the inscription. Pilgrims and tourists are received in a modern temple (Fig. 10).

8 King Shuddhodana sitting with Queen Maya while she relates her dream. A Brahmin kneeling before them insures that the birth of her son will be the birth of an extraordinary person. – Ajanta, grotto II, left-hand wall of the central chamber, 6th–7th century.

9 The birth of the future Buddha in Lumbini Park (Figs. 3 and 10). The style of this mural is quite typical of the last period of Ajanta art, with stylized female figures and "theatrical" expressions. – Ajanta, grotto II, left-hand wall of central chamber, 6th–7th century.

10 Lumbini (Rummindei). This relief (7th century?) of the birth of the future Buddha (Figs. 3 and 9) is preserved and venerated in a temple erected on the famous spot. The old sage Asita establishes the presence on the child's body of the thirty-two signs of holiness. Below, a haloed Siddhartha takes his first steps.



11 Scene of one of the earlier existences of the Buddha from the Vudhurapandita-Jataka. At that time he was a royal minister and sought the king's daughter's hand in marriage. His rival, Punaka, challenged him to a game of dice, which he won. The game was one of a traditional series which decided royal marriages – rather like a tournament. – Ajanta, grotto II, right-hand wall of the central chamber, 6th–7th century.

12 Another scene from an earlier existence of the Buddha: Princess Irandati, a beautiful serpent-woman *(nagi)*, the king's daughter, enjoying herself on a swing while to her right King Naga questions his court about details of the marriage. – Ajanta, grotto II.

13 Detail from the preceding picture: the beautiful Irandati on her swing. The swing suspended from the roof of a small pavilion is the symbol of love and the marriage bed. It is often mentioned in the relevant literature, and a number of popular customs connect it with prosperity, fruitfulness, and the annual renewal of nature. – Ajanta, grotto II.

14 A scene from the Shibi-Jataka illustrating an earlier existence of the Buddha. Here he appears as the king of the Shibi who decided to save a dove pursued by a falcon. To satisfy the falcon, he asked for scales to be brought (to right of picture), placed the dove in the scales and balanced it with his own flesh. An instance of exceptional compassion. – Ajanta, grotto I, front wall, 6th–7th century.

15 High relief showing a prince (?) and a boy, but with no inscription to identify them. The style suggests that it is very old, about 1st century B. C. The man is wearing a headdress which identifies him as a king. – Amaravati, Royal Museum, Madras.

16 This detail from a mural with a pair of lovers *(mithuna)* inside an awning, possibly an illustration to the Vishvantara-Jataka, is intended mainly to show the "life of pleasure" in a royal court. The servant girl on the right with the water pitcher is wearing Iranian dress, which indicated good taste in the Gupta period. – Ajanta, grotto XVII, wall at back of verandah, end of 5th century.

17 Left-hand section of the same painting, possibly showing the moment at which the princely heir Vishvantara, the future Buddha, reveals to his wife – protected by a sunshade – her banishment from the kingdom. – Ajanta, grotto XVII.

18 A mural with a scene as yet uninterpreted, but stylistically typical of the period. Posture, expression, and apparel suggest a refined courtly life. The formal use of chiaroscuro was formerly thought to indicate a western (Byzantine) influence. – Ajanta, grotto I, right-hand wall, left-hand section, 6th–7th century.

19 The story of King Udayana of Kaushambi who, like Siddhartha, comes upon his wives asleep in the harem (right-hand side). Panel from a stupa cladding in Nagayunakonda, h: 1.30 m., marbled limestone, 3rd century. – Paris, Musée Guimet (gift of C. T. Loo).

20 The bodhisattva Prince Siddhartha seated in a pleasure garden with the women of his harem. A river flows at his feet, a woman standing half in the water throws him a garland, another recumbent woman plays with a duck, and to the right a couple are drinking wine from the same cup. On the right-hand side a pair of lovers *(mithuna)* stand between two pillars. – Nagaryunakonda.

21 Votive tablet in molded terra-cotta from Kaushambi, 1st century B. C. – New Delhi, Indian National Museum. The tablet is pierced for hanging like similar terra-cottas. It shows a pair of lovers *(mithuna)* on a double seat, a theme probably chosen for a domestic shrine.

Mahayanaka rules wisely for a long time, but experiences an ever stronger longing to dedicate himself to the withdrawn monastic life. Borne aloft on the state elephant – that is, with great pomp (Fig. 23) – he leaves his capital for a deserted, rocky area where he can seek the counsel of two holy ascetics (above left).

The beautiful Shivali tries to hold him back by means of stupendous banquets with an orchestra and a famous dancer (Fig. 22). But in vain. He decides to become an ascetic. Shortly afterwards the queen enters a convent. – Ajanta, grotto I, left-hand wall, 6th century.

26–27 A sequence which possibly also illustrates the Mahayanaka-Jataka. The scenes take place in three pavilions and are elegantly divided by the red-lacquered columns beautifully ringed in gold beneath their capitals. Should it be read from left to right, or in reverse? Archaeologists plump for the former. Fig. 26 shows a young, black-haired monk on the left; he holds a begging bowl and is resting on a low stool opposite some young women who bring him his meal and greet him respectfully. The second pavilion in the right-hand half of the picture is located in an enclosure with a banana plantation stretching out behind its walls. There are two sturdy bamboo trees to the left. Four people, among them a bearded and moustached Brahmin with a hair-knot, seem to be begging for alms. In the middle we can pick out a female dwarf (harems always included them, just as European courts had their jesters). She is mounting the steps; on her head she carries a tray which a young woman is taking from her. The old eunuch who guards the harem *(kanchukin)* is recognizable from his white headdress and the staff on

22–25 These sequences are illustrations to the Mahayanaka-Jataka, which describes an earlier existence of the Buddha. Mahayanaka decided to visit Sri Lanka (Ceylon) as a merchant and to make his fortune there. Then he would return and take over the kingdom stolen from him by his uncle on his father's side. As an obedient son, he says goodbye to his mother (Fig. 24, left-hand scene) and asks her advice. Then he rides forth from the city in the midst of his courtiers and wives (right-hand scene). He boards a ship and sets himself up in a magnificent deck pavilion (Fig. 25). But the ship founders and does not reach the golden land. Mahayanaka is miraculously saved. He succeeds in returning to the kingdom ruled over by his uncle, who, he learns, is now dead, having chosen as his successor whomsoever his daughter, the beautiful Shivali, might find pleasing. She falls in love with Mahayanaka. Since the indications that he should accede to the throne are favorable, he is enthroned.

which he rests. A slave is carrying a fat-bellied jug. A young servant girl with a key makes for the room shown in Fig. 27. Here the most significant event of the sequence takes place: the enthronment of King Mahayanaka and his ritual cleansing *(abhisheka).* – Ajanta, grotto I, same wall, 6th century.

28 In the rear wall is the entry to a chapel containing an enormous statue hewn from, and in, the rock. It represents the Buddha's first sermon in Sarnath. He is sitting on a throne in the lotus position and makes the gesture of setting the wheel of the Law in motion. This wheel is shown in relief on the base of the throne, framed between two gazelles facing one another. The fine door decoration is typical of the Gupta period (see Fig. 73). – Ajanta, grotto I, 6th century.

29 The chapel in Fig. 28 is flanked by two paintings of large bodhisattvas; that to the left of the entrance is illustrated here. He is richly adorned and his body is in the ordained position of the "threefold inclination" *(tribhanga);* he has a lotus blossom in his right hand. There are several people to either side of him, among them a dark-skinned princess (?). Behind him there is a rocky landscape with a genie playing a musical instrument, an ape, pheasants, and so on (see Fig. 31). – Ajanta, grotto I.

30 As a counterpart to the last illustration, on the right there is a second great bodhisattva, dark-skinned, beautifully and expensively adorned and also in the *tribhanga* position. To his right a king (or donor?) offers him lotus blossoms. There is a couple above, to the left. The imagery has not been interpreted as yet. – Ajanta, grotto I.

31 Head of the Bodhisattva of Fig. 29. Note the very fine headdress decorated with gold metalwork and colored stones, the modeled features, the long hair adorned with flowers, the different earrings, the pearl necklace and the twisted Brahminic thread – a sign of high degree. – Ajanta, grotto I.

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FROM THE GREAT DEPARTURE
TO THE ILLUMINATION

There is no clear-cut delimitation between the moment when the horse Kanthaka leaves the palace of King Shuddhodana, secretly carrying the crown prince, and the time when the latter takes off the clothes and trappings of kshatriya. In fact, as soon as Siddhartha made the decision to give up a life of pleasure, the cycle of Illumination had started. And the romantic form that his hagiographers enjoyed giving to the first stage of his life is replaced by a more scholastic aspect, more in conformity with the spirit of the monks who related the second phase: the quasi-miraculous intervention of the gods will become quite secondary—though wondrous elements will not be excluded.

As soon as the bodhisattva finds himself alone, having sent the gods away and bidden his squire and horse to return to Kapilavastu, he goes on, walking barefoot toward the Southeast. From now on, he is no longer called Siddhartha ("Reached Goal") but is referred to by his family name of Gautama (Pali: Gotama).

He then starts a long pilgrimage that will last seven years, with two stages of unequal duration: in the first one, lasting one year, he will go through several kingdoms in order to gather information and learn. In the second one, lasting six years, which will keep him in one place, he will undergo ascetic and meditative experiences, leading to the achievement of his deep reflection, namely, the spiritual Awakening, or bodhi, after which he will devote himself to the preaching and teaching of his doctrine—which will be the topic of the next chapter.

Going in short stages, as did all the itinerant monks of his time—and even of ours—he resides temporarily near the town of Vaishali, capital of the Licchavis, that is, the present Besarh, on the left bank of the river Hiranyavati (called today Gandak). There he meets a yoga master, Arada Kalapa (Pali: Alara Kalama), who guides about three hundred disciples, and asks him to explain his doctrine based on the (substantial) nonexistence of all things. Accepted as a student by the master, he will not be long in beating him on his own ground, and concludes: "In truth, this doctrine of Arada does not lead to salvation." And he decides to look elsewhere for another solution. Why not in Magadha, where there is, near Rajagriha, another famous master, Rudraka, at the head of seven hundred disciples?

He starts walking again. Arriving near the capital shortly before nightfall, on the slope of one of the high hills that surround the city (the present site of Rajghir), he settles to sleep far from the noise and disorder of the town. At dawn, holding his alms bowl in hand, he goes down through the streets to beg for some food. It so happens that Bimbisara, king of Magadha, who was then in residence in his capital, is promptly advised of Gautama's presence. On the following day, at sunrise, in the company of many townspeople, he goes up to the retreat of Gautama to greet him and converse with him. Perhaps that retreat was the place called "the Vulture Peak," where the future Buddha was to come back frequently to teach.

The first conversation between Bimbisara and Gautama had been, according to the texts, very cordial. And their friendship will last until the (tragic) death of the monarch. The latter—in spite of apocryphal detractors who accuse him of having had evil plans to prevent the future Buddha from reaching his goal—suggests that he stay in Rajagriha, and gives him a bamboo-planted plot of

ground that becomes one of his favorite residences: "Not too far and not to close to the city, easy of access, not too noisy during the day, silent at night," it was a propitious site for a retreat.

But Gautama had come to Rajagriha in order to become acquainted with the teaching of the master Rudraka Ramaputra, who was guiding seven hundred disciples and based his method on meditation. He therefore spends his time on doctrinal initiation. Much later, he will define it as follows for his own disciples: "It was based on the attainment (of a psychic state) in which there is no consciousness or unconsciousness anymore." As had been the case in Vaishali with the *yogin* Arada Kalapa, he is welcomed by Rudraka without reservations. But, after having practiced his technique, he does not find in it the solution to the problem of the end of samsara; neither does he discover there peace and supreme intelligence, in a word: nirvana. This is, in fact, the second instance of refusal on the part of the bodhisattva to enter the path of yoga, whose theory of bodily mortification seems as negative to him as the pursuit of a life of pleasure. Yet, in the usual program of Brahmanic formation, asceticism was a mandatory step to Knowledge. Even if he denies its effectiveness, one must note that he took pains to get acquainted with it and even to personally submit to it. Thus he did practice exercises of ecstasy and mystical recollection under the aegis of both masters.

Concluding that his efforts are vain, he leaves Rudraka, taking along five of his disciples—perhaps in agreement with him rather than behind his back. Yet the fact is that he now has the basics of the philosophical teaching of his time and a smattering of the psychological (and even magical) gymnastics of yoga. Together, the "Five" and himself go on foot in the direction of Gaya, also located in the kingdom of Magadha (today a holy city for the followers of the god Vishnu). They settle nearby, at Uruvilva (present Urel), in the valley of the river Nairanjana (Lilaganj), an area of groves and hamlets, peaceful and propitious for retreats. The bodhisattva deems it quite satisfactory for a young man of a good family who wishes to devote himself to meditation: "If such is my desire," he says, "I must settle here." He will stay there six years, during which time he practices ascetical experiments, strict austerity—which he will later give up definitively—meditation that was to lead him to the crowning stage of his search: the bodhi, or Illumination.

Strangely enough, the bodhisattva had already—according to the texts—recognized that mortifications were useless and left his masters for that reason, yet he starts to inflict upon himself the worst food deprivations, to engage in almost unbearable bodily contortions, to bear almost to the point of fainting the intolerable heat of the Indian sun, aggravated by that of the fires lit around him. Is this in order to convince himself that such endeavors are inane or to prove the point to others? Or else is it a coercive means to crush in himself any trace of attachment to worldly life that he might have retained?

The point is that he managed to worry the gods themselves. They dispatch to him his mother, Queen Maya, who had been settled in the divine lands since he had reached his first week of human existence. Maya comes down from heaven in her human form, escorted by many secondary female deities. She persuades him only for a brief period, for as soon as she has returned to her celestial sojourn, the bodhisattva returns to his abstinences and all kinds of deprivations.

The results are appalling: hidden in a refuge under a rock, he becomes a living corpse, skeletonlike,
44 with hollow eyesockets, jutting jaws, his ribs visible, and veins showing on his face and all over his body. The *Lalitavistara* dwells at length on this episode and has the future Buddha say that his limbs resemble knotty rattans, his torso the shell of a crab, and his eyes stars reflected at the bottom of an almost dried-out well. Many other Buddhist texts have dwelt on this theme with complacent dramatization. And plastic art, especially in Gandhara (present Pakistan), delighted in the representation—often very beautiful and moving—of the future Buddha reduced to the state of an ascetic having reached the extreme limit of physical weakness, but whose psychic strength is presumed to have attained, in contrast, an enormous growth.

And now, just as his mother had been goaded to worry by the gods, his father, Shuddhodana, also wants to ascertain that his son is not in danger of dying, and he sends emissaries every day to inquire about his health. The gods were also anguished: should Gautama pursue his austerity program, he would perish and thus not achieve what they wished, namely, the "career" of a Buddha, to which he had been predestined.

Then, emerging from the cataleptic state into which his excessive mortifications had put him, the bodhisattva progressively regains consciousness, and lucidly takes his bearings. Though he only has one more step to go in the ascetic path, he gives it up because he has already reached the conclusion that his way will not lead him to the Illumination that will put an end to suffering, that is, birth, sickness, old age, and death. And he decides to go back to a normal life, to eat and be active again rather than insist on withdrawing in a retreat isolated from men.

Very disappointed by this decision, in which they see only cowardice, lack of perseverance, and even treason against a means accepted and pursued in common during five years, his five companions, the former disciples of Rudraka in Rajagriha, refuse to follow his way and leave him, they then go to Varanasi (Benares) and settle in the Deer Park. The future Buddha will have the opportunity to find them there, and then to convert them to his views.

Thus Gautama is on his own again, exhausted and bare of all garments. But he knows very well what he wants to do: he remembers his first meditation under the rose apple tree, while his father and his ministers were ploughing the first furrows of the year. It had been a premonition (forgotten since?) of the goal he is pursuing; now he is convinced: it is neither through philosophical teaching nor through asceticism that he will reach this goal. He has tried both and failed in both cases. Thus it will be through meditation, reflection, and reasoning that he will be able to build a different ethics, to indicate a new way, to offer a new solution.

His first care is to procure some clothing before going down to the capital in order to implement his project. Having retrieved the shroud of a dead servant woman, which had been left on the cremation grounds, he then proceeds to wash it before putting it on. Let us note, by the way, that this shroud would have been red, since it had covered a woman, and that this was probably the reason for
53 his choice, since men's shrouds were white. In order to purify this cloth, he goes to a place near Bodhgaya where there is a pond—it became a pilgrimage site where the Chinese traveler Hiuan-tsang

came in the seventh century—known under the name of "Hit-by-hand." Such a description is easily understandable when one knows the technique of the laundrymen *(dhobi)* in India (even today): hitting at length a water-soaked cloth on the flat stones that rise above the surface of the water. In that instance, legend relates that Indra, king of the gods, caused a tile to be dropped into that pond so that the future Buddha would be able to hit his cloth and clean it.

This being done, he goes back to the shore and, with the help of the dryad living in a tree near the water, dons this shroud, which he drapes as a monastic cloak. As soon as he is thus equipped, a young woman arrives, Sujata ("Eugenia"), who is said to be the daughter of the nearby village's chief. Warned by public rumor—or even by the gods—of Gautama's decision to stop his rigorous fast, she
46 hastened to prepare for him a dish of rice in the same manner as the peasant women of today. But since it was for the future Buddha, Sujata "took the milk of a thousand cows, extracted seven times its purest cream, then pouring that cream and the freshest and newest rice into a new pot of clay, which she put on a new fire, she prepared that dish." During the cooking, all kinds of symbols of good omen show on the surface. Having poured the rice into a large new bowl made of pure gold, she offered it to Gautama.

47 There are several versions of the same deed, versions that are reflected in the iconography. At times—as in Ajanta—the religious man is invited by Sujata to come and eat in her father's house. At other times, he receives this bowl of rice from Sujata's hands during his morning quest for food. Or she herself goes to offer it under the tree where he sits. In yet another version, she has one of her servant girls bring it to him. There is even a Burmese (and also Khmerian, Laotian, and Thai) version according to which Sujata used to bring offerings to the sacred tree that was planted in every village; seeing the (future) Buddha motionless and meditating under a tree, she thought that he was the spirit of the tree *(yaksha)* and paid homage to him in that capacity.

Be that as it may, the *Lalitavistara* stresses the fact that the bowl containing the rice of Sujata was made of gold. It is quite clear that such a precious object could not suit a "renouncer." Compelled to keep it, since he had no other, Gautama then goes to the river Nairanjana (Lilaganj/Phalgu) in order
51 to bathe and rid himself of all the impurities accumulated since the beginning of his retreat. This is a famous scene, described in the texts and often illustrated (especially in Borobudur, central Java, ninth century), in which the deities joyfully escort him, showering him with flowers and pouring delightful perfumes into the water.

48 Once purified, the Predestined sits down and eats part of the rice given by Sujata. Then, faithful to his vow of poverty, he goes back to the river in order to throw away the gold bowl. The king of the gods immediately seizes it. And all the gods who had hastened to the spot carry to heaven the alms bowl *(patra)* in which the future Buddha has just taken his last meal before the great events that are to
125 follow. When the bodhisattva had stripped himself of his clothes after his departure from Kapilavastu, the Thirty-three Gods had already placed his turban in a higher plane of the divine sojourn.
113 Now, they will also put there the *patra,* establishing a yearly feast for the veneration of these two objects. The scene in which the gods take flight, carrying the gold bowl, inspired many artists of the

ancient schools and one of their most beautiful works is kept in the Government Museum of Madras (Amaravati school, ca. A.D. 150).

Properly dressed, fed, and washed as well as empty-handed, Gautama then directs his steps toward a great fig tree (pipal) that, like the rose apple tree of his first meditation, will shelter him from the sun during the whole period of his endeavor, the shade remaining motionless through the intercession of the gods. This fig tree was about six miles away from the refuge under the rock in which he
50 had inflicted on himself the austere treatment in the company of his five disciples—and about twelve
62 miles from the city of Gaya. It is precisely on that spot that a sanctuary will be erected later, first
63 around the tree *(Ficus religiosa)*, then near its successive offshoots.

On his way to the tree, Gautama spots a humble grass cutter mowing *kusha (Eragrotis cynosuroide Retz)*, a plant that had been used as early as the Vedic era for some sacrifices as well as for the making of cushions placed on the ground as seats during sacred or solemn rituals. He immediately remembers that the "Buddhas of the past" had used it to cover their respective seats. And he asked the peasant—who had the beneficent name of Svastika but who other texts claim was a Brahmin—to charitably give him a bunch of grass. Which said Svastika joyfully did, since he had understood the extraordinary reason for this request.

Reaching his fig tree and holding his grass, the bodhisattva goes around it seven times, keeping it to his right side (a propitious ritual), puts the bunch of grass at the foot of the tree, and sits down on this light vegetal carpet, facing the East, that is, the river Nairanjana.

Here occurs another episode. It is probable that the king of the gods did not deem it suitable that a potential Buddha, so close to his goal, should sit on a bunch of grass laid directly on the ground. Just as a flat stone had been miraculously supplied in the river Nairanjana so that the bodhisattva could clean his clothing by hitting it against the stone, a well-squared tile appears at the foot of the *Ficus religiosa* to give him a worthy seat; one could almost say: an altar. Thus it is on this tile, which the
49 texts call "the Diamond Seat" (*Vajrasana;* i.e., indestructible and unshakable), that he spreads the grass. He settles down in the meditation posture, legs crossed, his right hand over the left, the palms held up in the meditation gesture *(dhyanamudra)*, eyes half-closed, waiting for the Awakening. His skull, which is misshapen at the top *(ushnisha)*—the texts claim that this was due to the excess of his superior intelligence, while in fact, it seems that there is a much simpler explanation: the artists badly represented his haircoil—is covered with short and flat curls rolled ritualistically from right to left, or as in Gandhara, with soft and wavy hair.

Perfectly motionless, immersed in a deep state of meditation, he concentrates all his psychic strength, all his thought in order to receive the Illumination (bodhi) and makes the irrevocable vow not to move from his seat until he succeeds—or to die there if he fails. Having been prepared for a long time through the unfolding of events as directed by the gods, his reflection can now blossom. After the shock of the "four encounters," after the total renunciation of what had been his life for thirty years (a princely, sheltered, easy life; a life of pleasure and of devotion to family), he had lived seven years in research and experimentation, away from his kin, uprooted as it were, suffering in

body and spirit. But his spirit had never ceased looking for the remedy to the suffering caused by the "wheel of samsara." And Gautama, sitting under his tree, knows that he has reached his goal, that he will be able to explain the reasons and the mechanisms of the problem, and offer to mankind a definitive solution.

But this endeavor was not that simple. If all his work had been so far assisted by "the gods," there were also contradictory forces that would not fail to manifest themselves and act. These forces were also divine, but instead of residing in the higher planes of the heavens like the "Thirty-three," they inhabited the higher planes of another heaven: the *Kamadhatu* ("world of desires"). There reigns Mara, who is at the same time sovereign of the passions and the personification of Death, the tempting demon also called "the Worst" *(Papima).*

Thus it is in a mythological environment that the last act of the quest for Illumination will unfold. An act in two parts, abundantly described in various texts and no less richly depicted in works of art. In the first stage, Mara will lead a direct attack. He is a very powerful god, residing in the penultimate higher plane of the world of desires, ruling not only over the lower heavens but also over the earth and the tiered undergrounds of hell. Moreover, he represents all that the future Buddha aims to abolish: "In metaphysical language, he is the Spinozist tendency of being to persist in being; in mankind, he is the genius of the species; in man, he is the natural instinct; and it is thanks to him that, all being weighed and balanced, the world goes on" (Alfred Foucher, 1949). Quite clearly, he identifies himself with the Spirit of Life, that which Gautama cannot accept because this spirit unavoidably leads to rebirths, which he attempts to suppress. The future Buddha is therefore an enemy for Mara, one who has already declared a war against him by wishing to destroy his empire and "empty his kingdom."

Mara has the means to physically destroy Gautama. He rules over an army of monstrous beings; some of which are half-men, half-animals; others, men equipped with a second head grimacing on their abdomens. The most horrifying descriptions are given: skulls shaped like spiral shells, ears made out of animal horns, hanging tongues, protruding eyes, threatening claws. It is the same diabolical host that appears in the art of the Gothic cathedrals. All bear offensive weapons: arrows, javelins, clubs, war axes, and so forth. They wield uprooted trees, throw down mountains, provoke lightning, and let loose thunderbolts.

56 Unlike his troops, Mara is handsome, seductive, and it is thus that the artists have represented him. Alerted, as were the other gods, to the fact that the Blessed One was on the verge of reaching the Awakening (some even claim that he had challenged him to a fight), Mara decides to start the assault against him. He mobilizes all his demons, who throw at him, with a vengeance, all their most murderous missiles. But he had not taken into account the spiritual strengths accumulated by the future Buddha: not only does he not budge, carrying on his meditation, but the weapons do not even reach him. All the missiles, violently thrown at him, reach the invisible aura that surrounds him and they turn into flowers: the assault becomes a tribute. In fact, it is in just such a manner that the Buddhist monks of Tibet have often depicted the attack of Mara. Deeming their efforts to be doomed to failure, disheartened, the demons fall back and retreat in disorder, giving up such an uneven fight.

An interlude then takes place. Mara wishes to regain the advantage through persuasion. Conscious of the fact that he is a powerful god, he endeavors to convince the Predestined that he has to give him his place and, boasting of his own excellence in the presence of witnesses, orders him to depart. He
58 screams at him: "You are vanquished!" But the bodhisattva, who has no help whatsoever, is content
59 to reply, "O Mara, this Earth *(bhumi),* impartial mother of all beings, is my security." And while say-
60 ing these words, he stretches his right hand until the tips of his fingers touch the ground. The gesture
64 is frequently reproduced by the iconographers of the life of the Buddha; it sums up the entire episode
58 of the Illumination, the "calling of the Earth as a witness" *(bhumishparshamudra);* the interlude becomes the apex of the double scene, of which the second act will be further described. As soon as the Earth perceives the call of the bodhisattva for her testimony, she comes out, beautifully dressed, from the ground at the spot that he had touched with his right hand and, half-erect before him, greets him by pressing her hands together *(anjali),* trumpeting like an elephant—the latter being the sacred symbol of the cosmic zone of our planet—then she says very clearly that she stands as his security.

Twice defeated, Mara tries for the last time. After violence, after persuasion, comes the last scene: temptation. He immediately calls his daughters, who were "the most beautiful in the world" and enjoins them to go to the bodhisattva in order to display "the magic of women." Obedient, they dress and go. Mara had really miscalculated: How could one imagine that the former crown prince Siddhartha could fall into temptation? He had tasted all such pleasures in his palace and had run away from it because of his sudden disgust for these very pleasures.

52–56 There are three daughters: "Thirst" (or "Desire"), "Joy" (or "Tenderness"), and "Delight" (or "Concupiscence"). Expert in the art of seduction, fascinating in their grace and physical perfection, adept at the whole gamut of smiles and winks, lascivious or chaste posturings, they multiply their charming maneuvers before the future Buddha. In vain. Without even turning his head to see them, simply by fluttering his eyelashes, he dismisses them and—instantly—they turn into old women, wrinkled, decrepit, and disheveled. That scene, which would be cruel if it were not an allegory, was represented with the complacency of the Tibetan monks on the banners depicting the assault of Mara, the calling of the Earth as a witness, and the ultimate attempt at temptation by the daughters of the Love/Death god.

49 Having thus defeated the evil Spirit, the bodhisattva, rid of Mara, his armies, and his daughters,
54 brings back into his lap his right hand on top of his left one in the gesture of *dhyanamudra* and, once again perfectly motionless at the foot of the pipal tree, immerses himself anew in meditation. He will remain thus for the next twelve hours.

The sun has just set; it is six o'clock and the night that is starting will not end until the next morning at six when the dawn begins. The surrounding countryside is silent under a full moon, as always in April/May because of the geographical location of this area of Bihar "crossed" by the Tropic of Cancer. Twelve night hours is the time—undoubtedly symbolic—that the canonical texts allot to the future Buddha for his reaching the Awakening. They divide it in three watches of four hours each,

during which the bodhisattva disposes his thought toward the precise goal he has assigned for himself: find the remedy—and make it accessible to all—to break the circle of samsara, define the Four Noble Truths, which summarize the doctrine he will teach for about fifty years, a doctrine that will spread after his death to most of Asia and endure until our time, twenty-five hundred years later.

That particular night, the first watch starts at the moment that is always so impressive in these areas where the darkness settles on the ground fifteen minutes after the sun has disappeared from the horizon. In the program of the Awakening, this is nothing more than a preparatory exercise: strengthened by his past experiences, the bodhisattva grasps the problem by the roots. He takes a general view of the universe and of the beings that inhabit it. He contemplates in all its complexity the futile agitation of creatures inexorably caught up in the perpetual motion of rebirth, comparing its mechanism to that of the noria, the great wheel equipped with swinging pots that is installed at the beginning of the dry season in riverbeds, near the banks, and that, activated by the stream, is used to raise the water and pour it into bamboo drains directing it to the canals that are used for the irrigation of the fields. The image is well chosen: whoever lives in a rural environment has seen the noria at work, recognizes it from afar, and can identify the squeak of wet wood it produces when turning. Any inhabitant of the subtropical countries can easily understand this comparison between the endless race of the noria pots—which fill up with water, then are emptied, and start all over again at the next round—and the ascending or decreasing rhythm of samsara, which is also symbolized by a wheel: "The bodhisattva saw the beings. He saw them falling in order to be reborn, from high or low caste, happy or unhappy, evil or good, depending on their karma." He takes note lucidly, without taking sides. He sees on the one hand those who sin "in words and thought, who vilify the good people, who profess false doctrines"; and on the other hand, "those who behave well in their deeds, words, and thoughts, who do not speak ill of good people, who profess the true doctrine." He predicts a bad rebirth (possibly hell) for the former and a good one, in the worlds of heaven, for the latter. It is the end of the first watch—and also the outline of Buddhist morality.

During the second watch, which starts immediately, from ten o'clock in the evening until two o'clock in the morning, the bodhisattva considers his own case. Thanks to his "suprahuman eye" he sees in his thoughts "hundreds of thousands of millions" of former existences, his own as well as those of other people. He remembers the lives he had as an animal (various birds, antelope, monkey, buffalo, elephant, horse) and as a man (tailor, merchant, Brahmin, royal prince, etc.), and he knows that on each occasion he has progressed from birth to birth because he has exerted himself in the practice of what Buddhism calls charity.

Such a retrospective is doubtless not only meant to evoke the innumerable stages due to karma; it is a kind of logical preamble to the theme that will be taken up in the third and last watch, from two to six o'clock in the morning, namely, human suffering. This ultimate phase is surely the most important and the most determinant of the nocturnal meditation, at the end of which the almost Buddha will have brought to its term the chain of causes and effects of pain.

For as he now knows, nothing happens without a cause. The mechanism has to be disassembled piece by piece. And one must go back, step by step, to its origin, so as to remedy it. This is what the canonical texts present under the name of nine, then twelve "Productions," the bases of which were probably expressed by the Buddha himself, then transmitted by his disciples.

We could not possibly trace in detail here the way the future Buddha reasoned, but we must sum it up. It unfolds as follows: human suffering lies in old age, sickness, and death—the *leitmotiv* of his approach. What phenomenon is at the origin of old age, sickness, and death? It is birth, the coming into existence. What causes the coming into existence? The coupling of the parents. What comes before this coupling? Desire, provoked by feeling. But how is this feeling itself provoked? By the contact between the senses and sensible objects; namely, by the six senses, our five external senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste) and the inner sense *(manas).* The existence and activity of the senses are those of a person who will, by very definition, use them and receive from them sensory information. A person has, of necessity, a "form" (rupa), that is, a body, and a name *(nama),* since, according to the Indian theory, *nama* is the generatrix of existence.

Thus one reaches the tenth "Production," close to the conclusion of this chain: When is there name and form *(namarupa)?* When there is consciousness, or better yet, awareness of the personality. But when is there awareness? When there are, says Gautama, predispositions; which can be interpreted as a hereditary ground determining a potentiality, even a predestination. And he illustrates his discourse by a comparison with the potter who shapes at will the mass of humid clay out of which he will make vases of different shapes.

The twelfth and last "Production" is a surprise: When and how is there a predisposition? When there is a nonknowledge. What is this affirmation doing there, posing as a conclusion, and seemingly unrelated to the exposition of the eleven others? In fact, one must understand that the unknowable is quite naturally at the end of the chain, preventing one from going further and explaining the predispositions. If Alfred Foucher's interpretation is correct—and it is probably the most likely one—this nonknowledge is a lack of lucidity; it is a psychic state that one must fight by creating conditions favorable to the appearance of knowledge, "just as the medical doctor cannot give health to his patient, but can help him to recover health" (see Jean Naudou, *The Buddha,* 1973).

Gautama now has the Four Noble Truths; he receives the Awakening *(sambodhi):* he has become Buddha, "awakened." When, later on, he will evoke this momentous occasion before his disciples, he will say, "My mind was liberated, ignorance vanished, knowledge was acquired, darkness melted away, light sprang out."

Then, legend comes back into the picture: the gods hasten once again, great wonders happen one after the other, the Buddha is seen surrounded by an intense light.

From then on, he is known under the name of Sakyamuni, the Sage (or the Monk) of the Sakyas. For seven days, he remains seated under the pipal tree, continuing his meditation and enjoying his Buddhahood. Seven days is also the lapse of time that had been observed by the "Buddhas of the past"; it is also the time during which kings must remain on the spot of their consecration. Then,

claim certain texts, he rises through levitation and remains for a second week northeast of "his" tree, which he contemplates without blinking his eyes. During the third week, he walks—still meditating—on a gold walk that the gods have built for him, a "copy" of which made out of brick was dug out by Sir Alexander Cunningham, and had been described by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuan-tsang in the seventh century. He devotes a fourth week to meditation, northwest of the pipal, over the work he is going to start and its modalities. The fifth week is spent under the banyan of the goatherd, while he still discusses with himself the best way to transmit his discovery.

During the sixth week, a different episode occurs: the Buddha walks four miles away from the pipal, to a pond in which the snake king *(nagaraja)* Mucilinda has established his residence, but while he meditates there, a torrential and out-of-season rain, such as India experiences at times, falls on the area, flooding the ground and raising the level of the pond. Realizing that the Buddha is in danger of being drowned in the water, absorbed as he is in his meditations, the snake king goes to his help. Coiling his rings around the motionless Buddha, he lifts over his head his seven hoods spread as a fan, to protect him from the wind. The tempest lasted seven days, during which the Buddha meditated in great peace and silence, isolated as he was from the tumult of the raging elements. This scene has been very popular in Southeast India, in the school of Amaravati, for instance. But since they could not show the Buddha sitting inside the wall that the rings of Mucilinda had built around him, the sculptors represented him sitting on them as if on a high pedestal, the hoods spread fanwise over his head. This theme was later transmitted to the countries of Southeast Asia that converted to Buddhism, especially in the Khmer country (Cambodia), where it took a great importance, since a royal symbolism is attached to it.

Lastly, the seventh week (in certain texts, only four weeks in all are described) takes place under the tree called Rajatana, "King's Residence." Yet another episode is described, with different timings, depending on the sources: a new—and last—attempt by Mara, accompanied only by his daughters, to convince Sakyamuni to enter *parinirvana* immediately. But the Buddha does not see matters this way: his plan has been perfectly evolved and he has no intention of changing it. He therefore replies—we sum up—that he will only enter *parinirvana* after he has gathered monks "well trained, intelligent, wise," capable of teaching the Law, the Buddha, and the Community. Once more rejected, Mara leaves in disappointment. It would be at that point that his daughters are turned into old women. The latter having then expressed sincere repentance, the Buddha would have consented to their recovering their beauty.

During all this period that follows the Awakening, the Buddha, absorbed in his meditations, has taken no food. Now that he is about to return to a physically active life, he feels the need to restore himself. That need will encounter two obstacles: indeed, one must be aware that his Buddha state does not exempt him in any way from contingencies, and moreover the Awakening had, conversely, ordained him (as if through spontaneous generation) a Buddhist monk. Thus he must follow the rule—even though he has not yet established it. Therefore, he can only feed himself through alms, and he can only receive alms in a container and not directly from hand to hand. In the immediate surround-

ings of the bodhi there are no dwellings. And since he threw into the Nairanjana the gold bowl that Sujata had offered to him before he settled under the pipal, he owns no such utensil.

In keeping with their habits, the gods could easily have supplied him with a meal. Yet, they do not manifest themselves—at least not at that time. The merit, which is quite extraordinary, has to be credited to two rich merchants—two brothers—Trapusha and Bhallika, who were leading a long train of five hundred chariots drawn by humpbacked oxen from the coast at Orissa toward central India. Passing by the Sakyamuni seated near the Tarayana tree, they notice his luminous beauty, which has not faded since the Awakening. Since they know, through prescience, that the sole daily meal of the monks has to be eaten before noon, and that the right hour is just then, they hasten to take action. In the provisions they carry, there must be something to offer this holy man. Indeed, there is a sweet dish made of honey and peeled sugar cane. Very respectfully prostrating themselves at his feet, the two merchants proffer these restoring substances to the Buddha. The latter is quite embarrassed: In what receptacle will he collect them?

This is an occasion for an immediate intervention on the part of the gods. The four great guardians who rule the four cardinal points rush to the Buddha, each bringing a gold bowl. But, as he had done with Sujata, the Predestined refuses their gifts: precious metals do not suit one who has stripped him-
71 self of all riches. As a last resort, the four great gods resign themselves to presenting him with four stone bowls, in conformance with the rule. Four are too many: he needs only one. No matter! In an instant, the Buddha finds a solution that will offend no one: he piles up the four bowls, one inside the other, and they miraculously fuse together and become one.

Then he can accept the meal offered in homage by the two merchants. And when the iconographies of Gandhara (present Pakistan) depict the scene, they take care to indicate on the side of the bowl three concentric lines showing the rims of each of the four bowls, which thus became a sole receptacle.

Afterwards, the Buddha explained to the two merchants the essentials of his doctrine, in a way that they could understand. At least, this is asserted by some texts. Later, having received as thanks for their offering hair and nail clippings of the Buddha—which will be turned into relics in their own area—Trapusha and Bhallika started again with their long train of chariots, and slowly receded from sight in the cloud of dust raised by the oxen's hooves.

Alone once again, the Buddha sits down at the foot of the goatherd's banyan in order to engage in last reflections. For he is beset by hesitations and doubts. Is it not futile to preach his doctrine? Will it not be too difficult for many among his future listeners? And whom should he teach first? No! If he has perfected his doctrine, it is in order to communicate it. As to the difficulties, he only has to com-
90 pare the individuals making up an audience with a lotus-covered pond: some of the flowers rise above the water and catch the light, others remain immersed, incapable of rising in the light, others yet are barely underneath the surface and might be able, one day, to reach the water level. Such are those who will hear his word. Even if they only belong to the last category, his own efforts will be worthwhile.

Not only is he then ready, but determined. He will leave the place where he has attained the Awakening—even though he will return later to the area. He still has to choose his first disciples. At the outset, he thinks about his former masters, Rudraka Ramaputra—who taught him in Rajagriha—or Arada Kalapa of Vaishali. But thanks to his "divine gaze," he ascertains that both have just died.

Then, there are no more hesitations: he will take the five former disciples with whom he lived in community at Uruvilva for five years. They hat left him, disapproving his decision of giving up the practice of austerity and mortification. He knows where to find them: at Varanasi (Benares), where they have settled.

Thus he leaves, barefoot in the dust, carrying his alms bowl made of stone, and he directs his steps
37 toward the Ganges, which he must cross. Waiting for the ferryman, he looks at the river. The ferry-
38 man refuses to take him across without payment, so Sakyamuni rises in the air and lands on the other bank.

The cycle of the Illumination is completed.

THE GREAT DEPARTURE OF PRINCE SIDDHARTA –
HIS LIFE AS AN ASCETIC –
THE ILLUMINATION UNDER THE BODHI TREE –
THE FIRST PREACHING OF BUDDHA SAKYAMUNI

32 The Great Renunciation: Prince Siddhartha leaves his palace at night. The relief is from the ancient period of Buddhist iconography, for the Buddha is not portrayed on horseback, instead his presence is shown by the sunshade, the symbol of high rank. Subordinate deities support the horse's hoofs in order to subdue the noise. The charioteer Chandaka precedes the mount in "western" dress, bearing in his left hand the *chakra*, or weapon which indicates his duties. Panel from a stupa cladding. Amaravati school of sculpture, 2nd century, marbled chalkstone, h: 0.90 m. – Paris, Musée Guimet (gift of the friends of the museum).

Fig. 35 shows the episode when the king, his father, buys back the two children and receives his wife Madhi again.

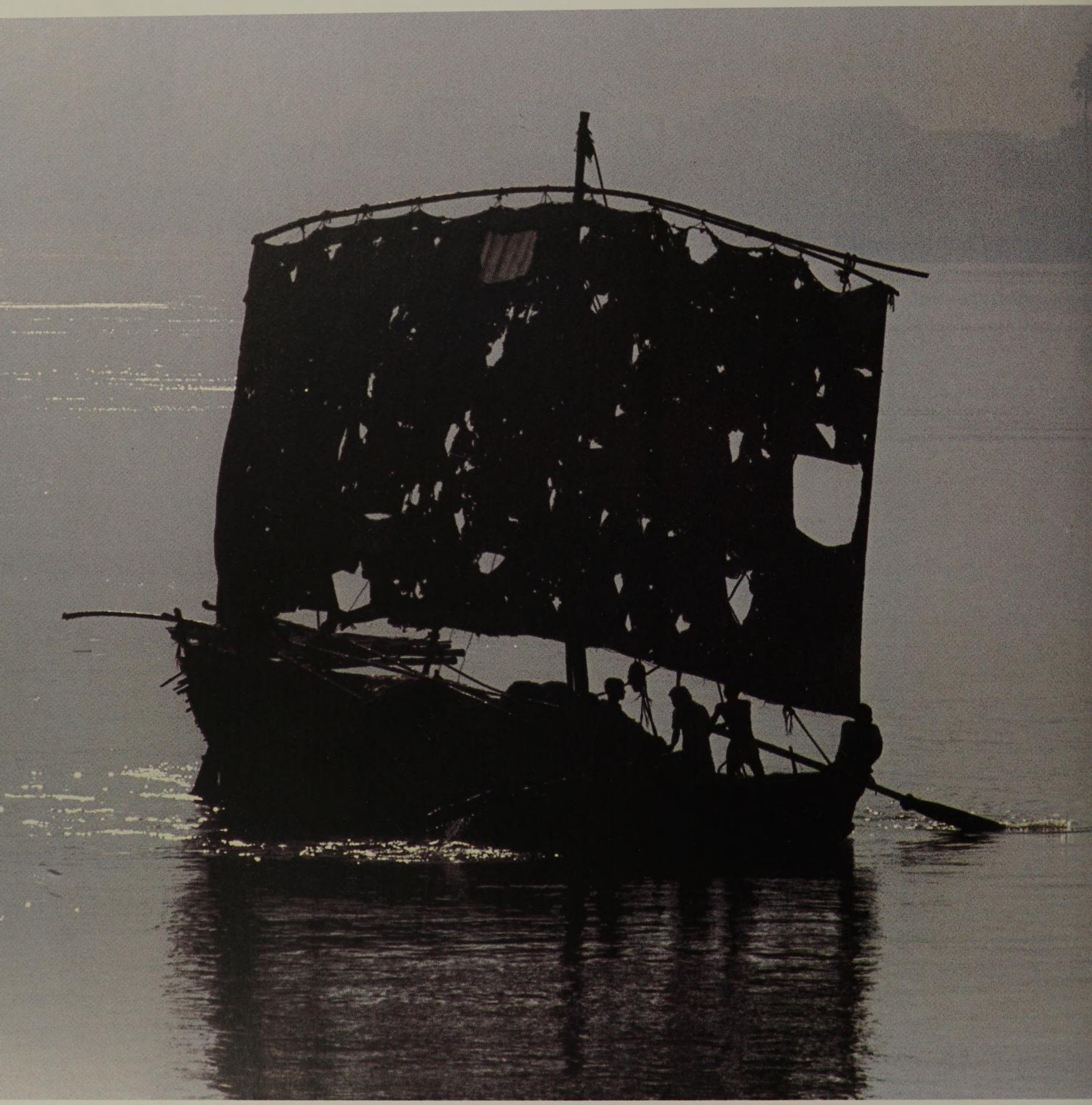
33–35 Three illustrations of episodes from the Vishvantara-Jataka, which describes earlier existences of the Buddha – those which were the most popular and most often illustrated. Prince Vishvantara allows himself to be banished from the country by his father, because he has given the state elephants to Brahmins. The king questions his servants and the prince brings the news to his wife, Princess Madhi (Fig. 34).

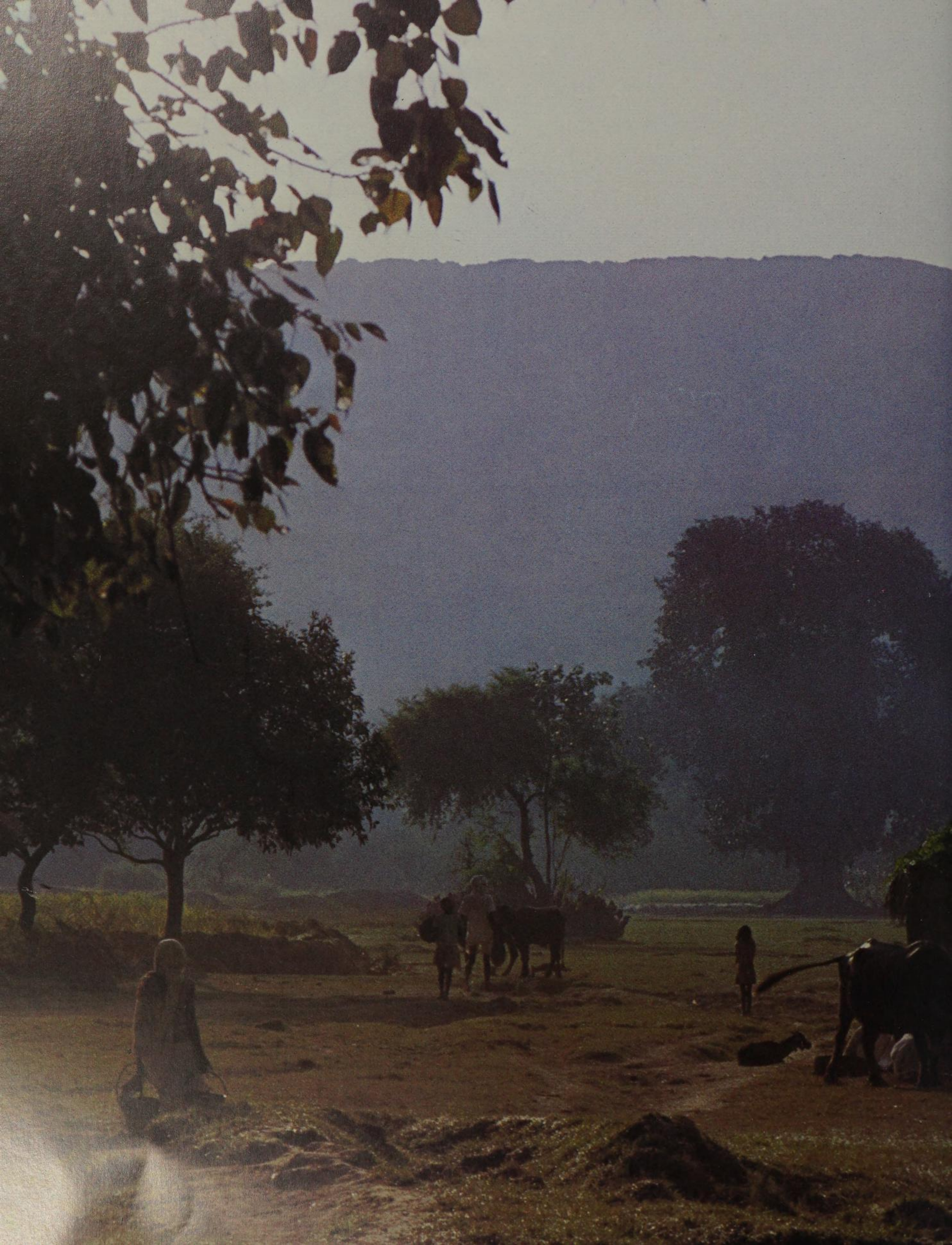
Together with the princess and her two children, he leaves the capital in a horse-drawn chariot. When he passes through the business quarter the god Indra, dressed as a Brahmin, asks him for his horses, and the prince gives them to him (Fig. 34). He is also prepared to part with chariot, children, and wife. Realizing that the prince's compassion is clearly unbounded, Indra returns his wife.

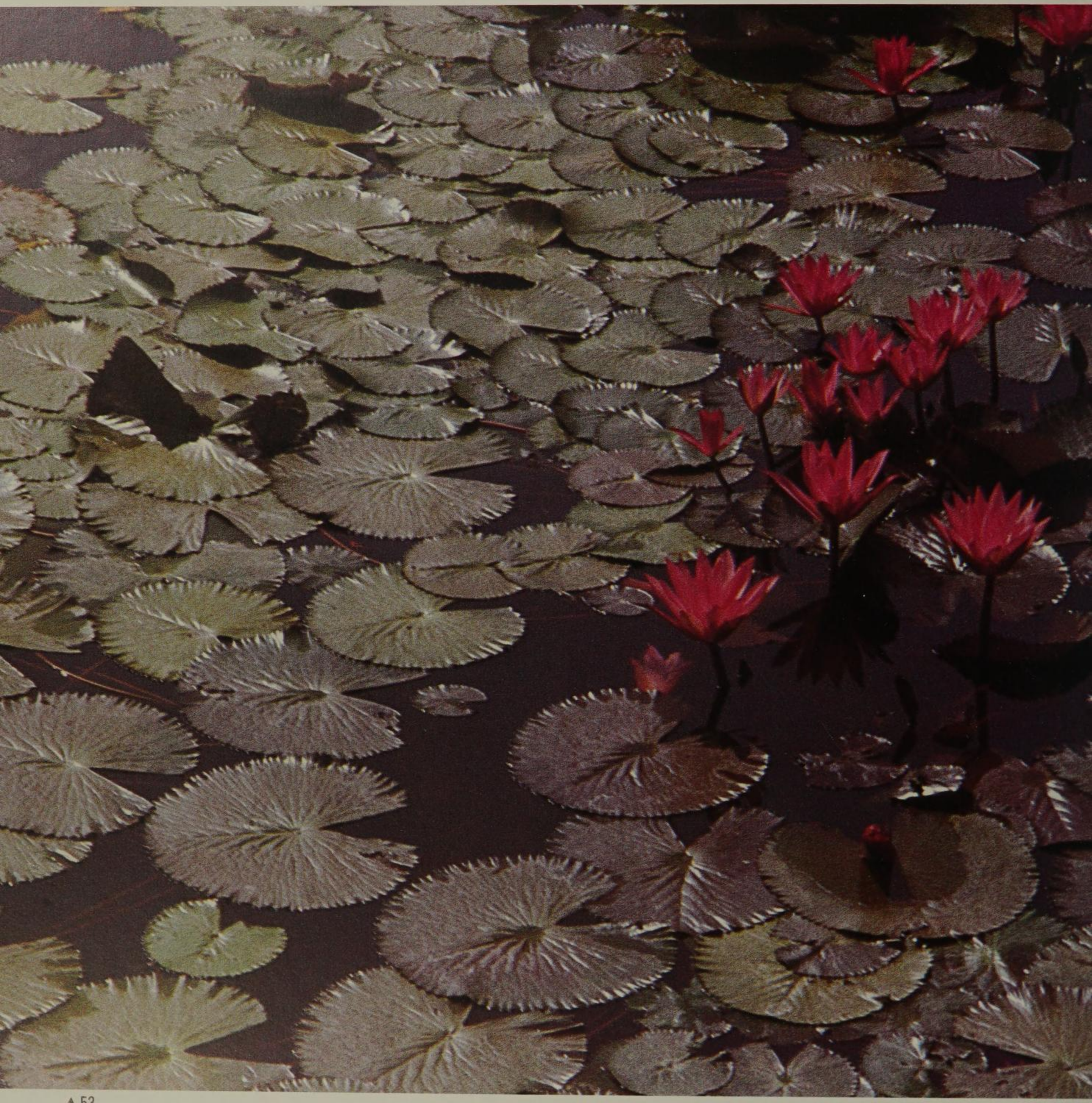
36 Preparations for the Great Renunciation. Queen Gopa is asleep on the marriage bed. The bodhisattva sits there, ready for flight; Chandaka, the charioteer, brings him his helmet, and the accoutred horse Kanthaka awaits his master (see Fig. 32). Grey slate relief from Gandhara, h: 0.27 m. – Paris, Musée Guimet (no. MG 4052), Haas gift.

37 A boat with a tattered sail being steered on the Ganges at Patna, the ancient Pataliputra. This present-day scene is probably hardly different from a river voyage in the Buddha's lifetime.

▲34 ▼35







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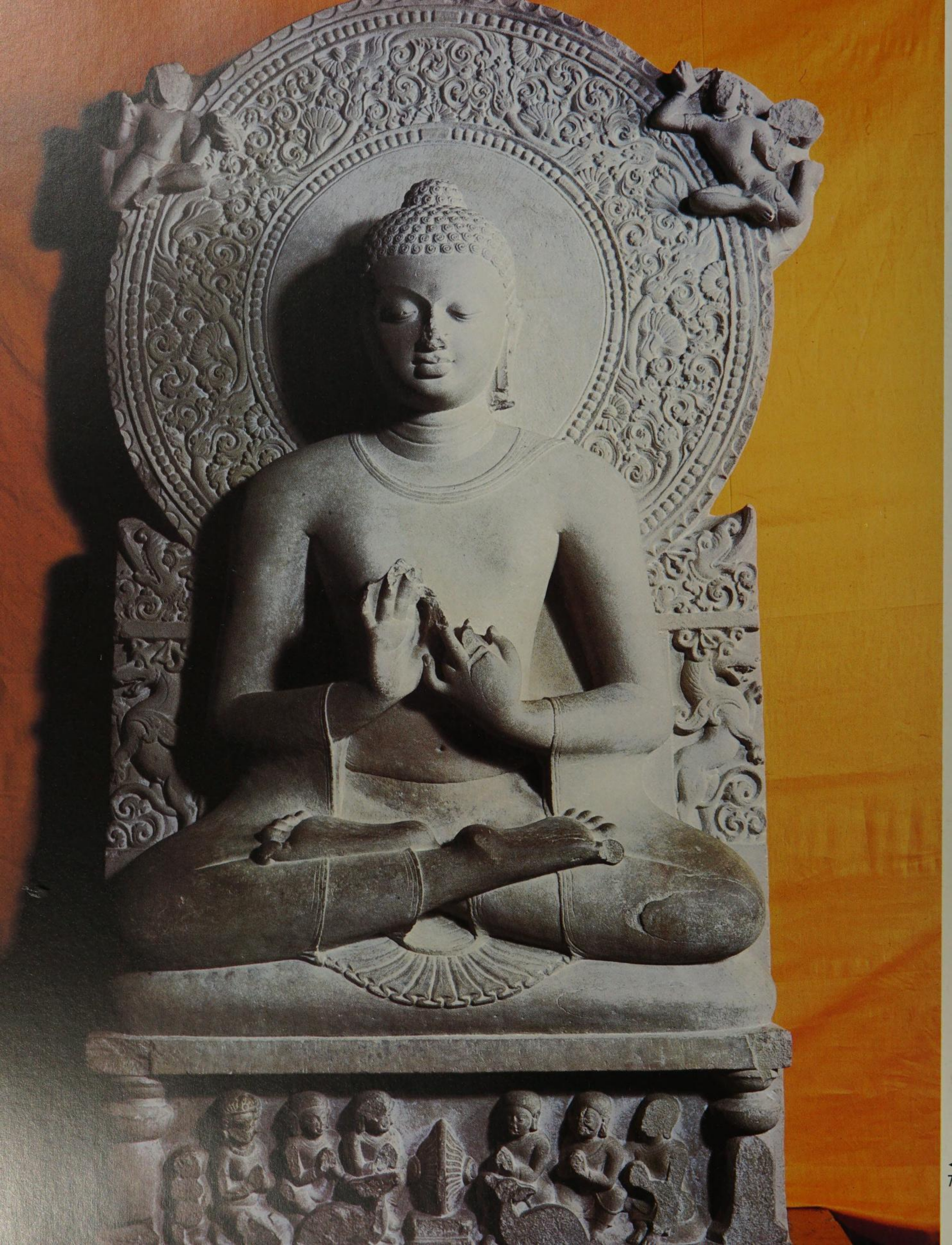
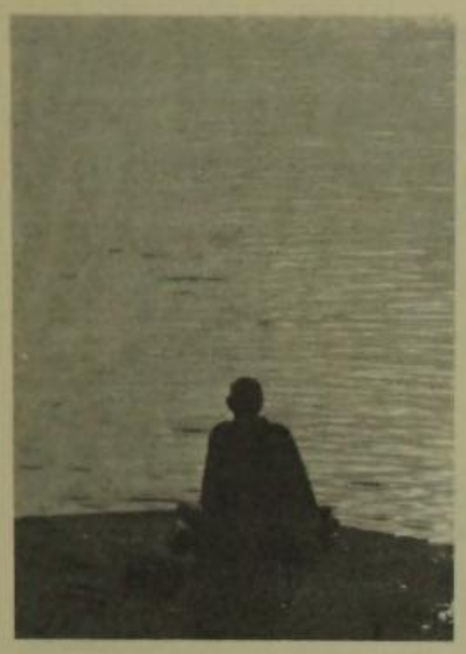




38 Perhaps the Buddha himself looked like this: a "holy man" meditating at sunrise on the Ganges near Benares (Naranasi), with his water jug close at hand.

39 In several of his earlier lives, the Buddha was reborn in the form of an ape. In this instance (Jataka no. 516) he yet again gives evidence of his nobility. A man who has lost his way in a forest (the sequence of pictures moves upwards) climbs a tree to pick fruit, but the branch breaks and he falls into a hole. The ape-bodhisattva hears the cries for help, climbs down to find him, and lifts him out safely. Then he falls asleep from exhaustion. But the starving man tries to kill him with a piece of rock (above right). The ape barely escapes its attacker, forgives him, and converts him by preaching a better understanding of the relatedness of all living things. – Ajanta, grotto XVII, 5th century, verso of façade wall.

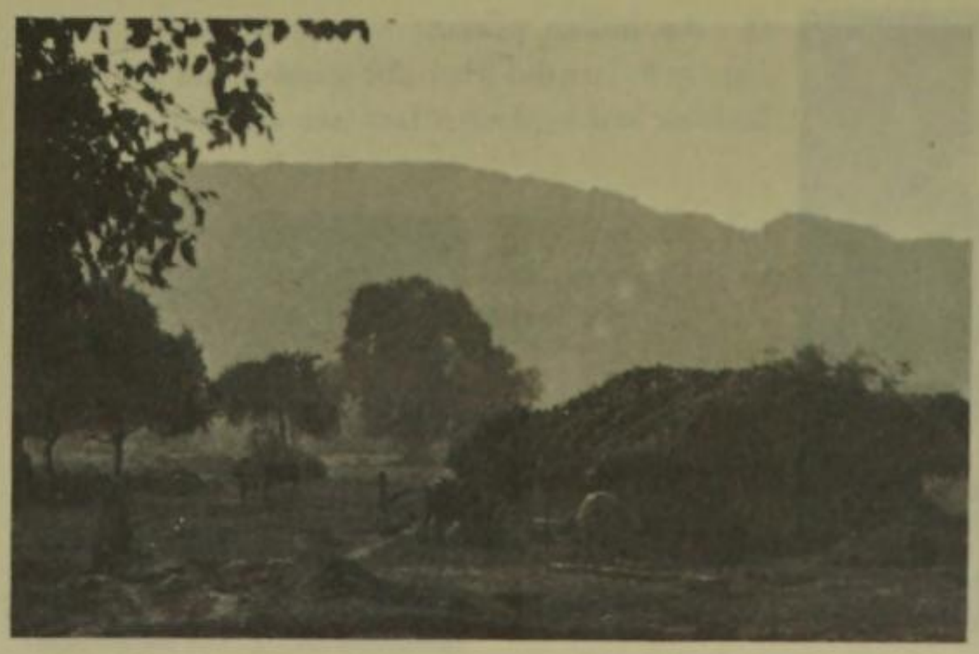
40 In another of his earlier lives the Bodhisattva, as the Mahisha-Jataka relates, was a buffalo gifted with unshakable patience. It had chosen a spot beneath a beautiful tree to rest awaile, a place where an ape also dwelled, and day after day the buffalo bore patiently the tricks the ape played on him. For instance, the ape thought it great fun to cover the buffalo's eyes with both hands. One day when the buffalo was away, another buffalo rested in the shade of the same tree. The unsuspecting ape jumped down from the tree and began his usual tricks, but was knocked to the ground and trampled under the creature's hoofs: he had mistaken his victim. – Ajanta, grotto XVII, right-hand wall, 5th century.

41 Fragment of a door cladding in grey granite, h: 0.77 m., from Gandhara (Pakistan). – Paris, Musée Guimet (no. MG 2119).

The Graeco-Buddhist School illustrated many legends. Below: an ape brings an offering to the Buddha Sakyamuni.

42 The bodhisattva Maitreya, future Buddha of the coming era, statue in bluish granite, h: 0.84 m., from Gandhara (Pakistan). – Paris, Musée Guimet (no. AO 2908), Alfred Foucher loan (see Fig. 129).

43 Indian farm near Gaya: in the background are the hills where, according to tradition, the great pupil Mahakashyapa took refuge after he had conducted the funeral ceremony for the Sakyamuni and had played a major part in the spreading of the Good Law. There, immobile and sunk in profound ecstasy, he is said to have awaited the coming of the Maitreya, the future Buddha, in order to present him with the Buddha's monastic robe.



44 The overhanging rock (now extended) where the Buddha is said to have dedicated himself to an ascetic life in the company of five monks, later his disciples (see Fig. 32). The rock is about 10 km. to the northeast of Gaya.

45 An emphatic representation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (the Lord who looks down from above), holding a lotus blossom in his left hand. – Malanda, site III, terra-cotta relief, at the site of discovery, c. 6th century.

46 An Indian peasant woman preparing a rice dish, as Sujata did when she learned that the future Buddha had broke his fast (see Fig. 47).

47 A mural representing Sujata offering the wholly emaciated Buddha the rice she has cooked, so that he will be sure to have at least one meal before his awakening. – Ajanta, grotto XVII, 5th century.

48 It was in this area on the left-hand bank of the Nairanyana (present-day Phalgu) that the future Buddha ate Sujata's rice. Two Sri Lankan pilgrim monks contemplate the spot. In the background are the ruins of a stupa erected to commemorate the event.

49 This Buddha, in the position adopted by Sakyamuni during the long meditation before his awakening, is a typical example of Hellenistic Buddhist style: he has a protuberant skull, a hair-tuft between his brows, and half-closed eyes. He is seated upon a plinth adorned with grass and leaves. Six Buddhas in the same position decorate the front of his seat. Statue from Gandhara (Pakistan), 3rd–5th century, grey granite, h: 0.66 m. – Chandigarh National Museum.

50 Temple with the tree of enlightenment in Bodhgaya. Since the reign of Emperor Ashoka (3rd century B.C.), new buildings have always been erected on this complex, which is revered especially because it was here that the Chosen One received enlightenment. The present-day temple was renewed first by the British and then by the Burmese (1832) (see Figs. 62 and 63).

51 A landscape on the river Nairanyana, where the future Buddha bathed before his sojourn under the fig tree at Bodhgaya, beneath which he was to look for spiritual illumination *(bodhi)*.

52 Mara's onslaught on the future Buddha while meditating. This is the decisive scene preceding the four night-watches at the end of which illumination was received. In an initial phase Mara's vile warriors attack the future Buddha with their weapons (left); in the second Mara's daughters try to seduce him (below right). – Ajanta, grotto I, 6th century, left wall of the antechamber to the sanctuary (see Fig. 56).

53 Near the temple of Bodhgaya is the pool which the god Indra created so that the Buddha could wash his clothes. It is carefully maintained and is spread with lotus blossoms, which are symbolically linked with the spiritual birth and preaching of the Buddhist Law.

54 Buddha in the meditation posture, with his hands in the *dhyanamudra*. Probably a Nepalese ivory carving. Possibly an image of the "transcendent" Buddha or Amitabha ("possessing immeasurable light").

55 Four km. from the tree of enlightenment is the pool where the serpent-king Muchilinda had his lair.

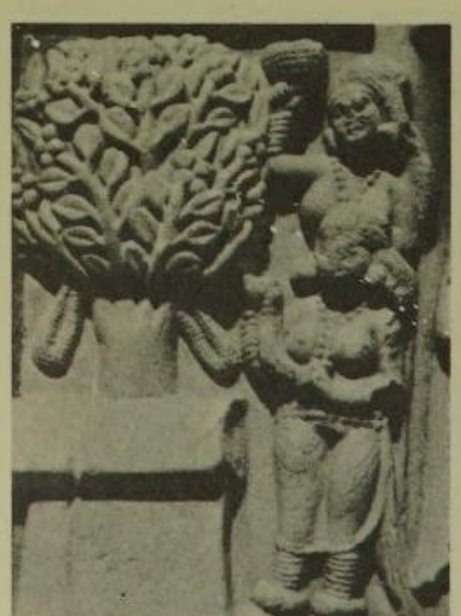
56 Mara's attack. Swastikas engraved in the cushions and the Buddha's footprints symbolize his presence on the throne erected at the foot of the tree of enlightenment. Mara's warriors brandish their weapons, and Mara himself – below left – realizes that he is defeated. To the right, his daughters try to seduce the Buddha. Above, the defeated Mara flees on his elephants. – Gantha-shala (Amaravati School). Panel from the cladding of a stupa: 2nd century, marble, h: 1.77 m. – Paris, Musée Guimet (no. MG 17066). Gift of T. C. Loo.

57 The Buddha is perpetually revered in Bodh-gaya. Hundreds of small butter lamps celebrate the anniversary of his birth.

58 Buddha Akshobhya, one of the five "transcendent Buddhas." He is making the gesture of "calling the earth to witness," as Gautama did after Mara's onslaught (see Figs. 59, 60, 64, detail 115). Statue from Mahoba (mid-north India). Chandella dynasty, 11th century, Lucknow State Museum (no. G 300).

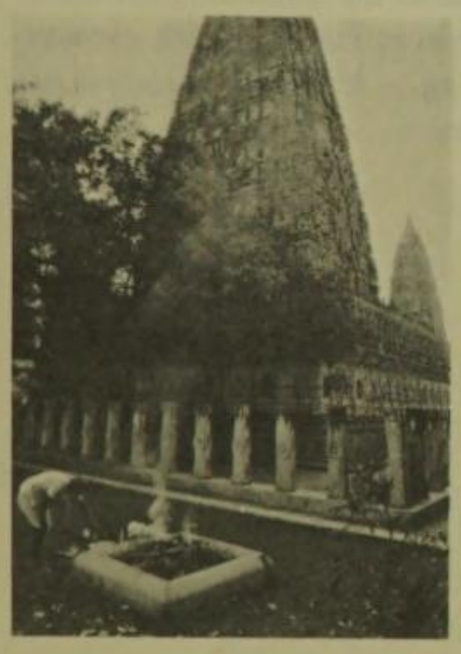
59 The Buddha Sakyamuni "calling the earth to witness." Possibly a 12th-century Sri Lankan work, for the kings of Ceylon made many gifts to the temple (see Figs. 60 and 64). It is continually recorded and painted as a sign of honor. – Bodh-gaya. Stele in the enclosure of the Mahabodhi temple.

60 The Buddha Sakyamuni "calling the earth to witness." He reclines on a seat symmetrically decorated with animals symbolizing the three stages of the cosmos: below, the elephant (earth), in the middle the rampant stag (ram?) (atmosphere), above that the monster of Makara (the heavenly waters). – Kushinagara. A stele in the southwest area of the excavation site is still in its original position above a spring, over which a modern temple has been erected.

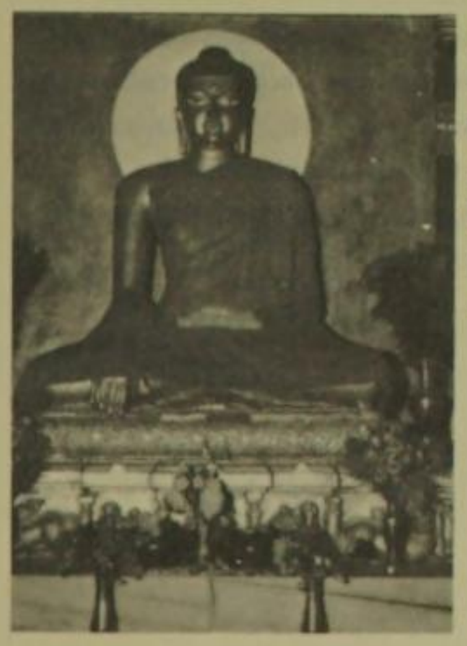


61 Two women bringing garlands and presents to the Buddha (not represented) sitting on the pipal tree of enlightenment. – Relief, c. beginning of the Christian era, in Santshi.

62 Tibetan monks have gathered before the tree of enlightenment in Bodhgaya and the modern altar erected there. This much-venerated tree is said to derive from the pipal tree under which Sakyamuni achieved enlightenment. The present tree is an offshoot of that destroyed in 1876.



63 As in this picture, an ancestral cult is practiced at each full moon in the southwestern corner of the balustrades around the temple of Bodhgaya (now conserved in the local museum).



64 In the central cell of the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya there is a large statue (13th century?) of the Buddha Sakyamuni "calling the earth to witness." It has been adorned by the Tibetan monks living in the neighboring monasteries, and thousands of pilgrims bring offerings to decorate the rather high altar on which the image is placed.

65 In the enclosure of the temple of Bodhgaya there is a large, carved stone, bordered above with rose-lotus leaves. In the middle are the Buddha's (Buddhapada's) footprints, deeply incised in the stone. Pilgrims sprinkle them with water and adorn them with flowers.

66 Head of the Buddha. The serene countenance, half-closed eyes, pouting lips, and elongated ears are typical of Gupta-period sculpture. The skull and protuberance are covered with flat locks of hair ritually turned to the right (the direction of happiness). Gupta art, 5th century, red sandstone, h: 0.51 m. – Mathura National Museum (no. 49–3510).

67 Reliefs from the façade of grotto XIX, Ajanta, 6th century. In the middle there is a majestic seated Buddha making the gesture of "driving the wheel of the Law" (that is, preaching) (see Fig. 69).

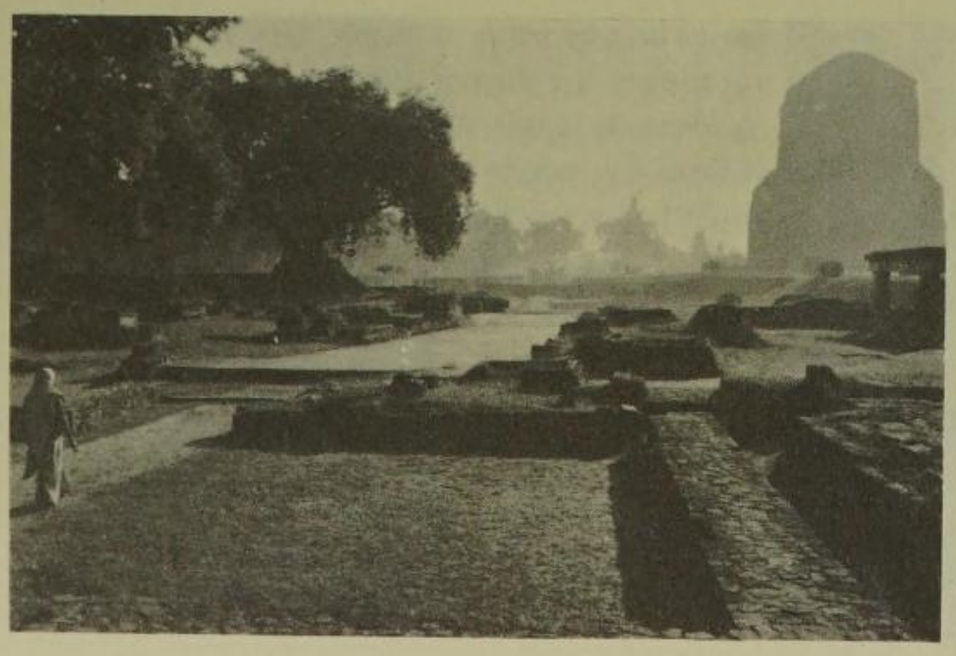
68 The two rows of large tiles embossed with rose-lotuses, before the completely ruined temple at Sarnath, represent the Buddha's "walk" *(cankrama)*. The temple is difficult to date precisely. It could be extremely old.

69 In the depths of the Vishvakarma grotto (no. 10) in Ellora there is a stupa with an extended frontal relief: the Buddha seated in majesty on a throne supported by two different lions, making the gesture of instruction. He is placed between two standing bodhisattvas. The iconography of the whole grotto is uniformly Mahayana Buddhist.

70–71 Slate reliefs (2nd–3rd century) from Gandhara (Pakistan). In both cases Sakyamuni is seated on a spot covered with couch-grass under the Bodhi tree, and makes the sign of fearlessness *(abhayamudra)*. Fig. 70 shows the conversion of two Brahmins in the presence of Vayrapani, who holds the diamond thunderbolt.

Fig. 71 portrays the divinities who brought the Buddha four stone bowls for his first meal after awakening; he unites them in one.

72 Sarnath. Six km. from Benares (Varanasi) is the Deer Park in which Sakyamuni converted his first five disciples. There are many ruins on this site, which has been built on since the time of Ashoka (3rd century B. C.). The ruins of the Dhamekh stupa, whose vast silhouette is visible to the right, include a fine stucco flower pattern (6th–7th century).



73 The Buddha Sakyamuni gives his first sermon in the Deer Park. He is making the movement of driving the wheel of the Law shown on the plinth between two recumbent deer in profile. Near the wheel are the Buddha's first five disciples, and to the left is the donor of this magnificent sculpture, which is typical of 6th-century Gupta style. – Sarnath, Archaeological Museum.

74 Detail of a statue of the Buddha in red sandstone in the same style as Fig. 73, c. 6th century. Note the full modeling. – Mathura, National Archaeological Museum.

75 The bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara holding the full rose-lotus *(padma)*. In his hair decoration (his own hair twisted into a knot) sits the transcendent Buddha Amitabha, whose emanation he is (see Fig. 54). Sandstone statue, 9th century, from Malanda, h: 1.52 m. – New Delhi, Indian National Museum.

THE PREACHING OF THE BUDDHA AND THE FOUNDING OF THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY

Upon arriving at Benares, which was then called Kashi, Sakyamuni immediately goes six miles north
72 of the town where the present site of Sarnath is, and where a hermitage had been established in the woods: the Deer Park, which had once been a hunting preserve for the king of Benares. It so happens that the deer who led the animals was none other than the bodhisattva during one of his former lives.

Seeing that the king indulged in veritable slaughters, he made an agreement with him, according to which the king would be given a deer for the royal table every day on condition that he would cease hunting on these grounds. But fate had it that a gravid doe was chosen. The bodhisattva offered his life to spare hers. Marveling at this gesture of supreme selflessness, the king of Benares granted safety to all the deers. This detail is of special interest, as will be seen later on.

The five former companions of the Buddha live in the park. Not yet having changed their opinion with regard to the behavior of him who had disappointed them, they watch him approach, determined not to greet him or even to let him in. Yet as he was coming closer to them, they felt more and
70 more ill at ease. "Unable to face the majesty and splendor of the Predestined, thrown off their seats, all broke their agreement and rose; one went before him, another took his alms bowl and his mantle, another offered him a seat, another brought him a stool, and another water to wash his feet."

Sitting down as they had invited him, the Buddha first exchanged with the Five "various pleasant
82 and friendly words." In their turn, they sit down with him, ready to pursue this pleasant conversation. But the Blessed One pays no attention: he wishes to put things straight from the outset. He is no longer, he says, the one whom they knew; he has discovered a way to escape from samsara, he has received the Awakening, he has become the Buddha. As such he has the supreme Insight, and he proves this immediately for them by describing in great detail all the thoughts they had harbored toward him. Contrite and subjugated by the Buddha, who from now on speaks as their master, the Five declare themselves ready to receive his teaching.

Then at the beginning of the third watch of a clear moonlit night, the Buddha starts his first sermon. As a preamble, he tells them that "there are two extreme ways that the religious must not follow," since neither of them could lead to salvation: the life of pleasure and the life of austerity. He has discovered a third way, which he calls the Middle Path, in other words, the middle of the road: it leads to peace, knowledge, insight, and lastly to nirvana. He does not intend to retrace the stages of his reflections during the quest for the Awakening. He simply sums them up in order to communicate the essentials, namely, the Four Noble Truths. On suffering: five kinds of objects of attachment are suffering: old age, sickness, death, union with what one does not love, separation from what one does love, not to obtain what one desires. On the origin of suffering: the craving leading from rebirth to rebirth, craving for pleasure, craving for existence, craving for nonexistence—all cause suffering. On the suppression of suffering: the complete destruction of desire. And he concludes: "This is, O monks, the holy truth about the path leading to the suppression of suffering; this is the sacred Eightfold Path of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration."

Even though this is nothing but a summary (one could call it a digest) of the Buddha's teaching, it is still considered by his followers as the core of his doctrine. The Five understood its meaning perfectly: "All that which is subject to birth is subject to destruction." And they immediately gave him their assent. One after the other, they asked the Master for orders. He complied with one sentence: "Live in sanctity in order to reach the total destruction of suffering."

It had happened: the basic order of the Buddhist community had been founded. It will, in the immediate future, then in the following centuries become deeper, more clear-cut, then diversified, even altered, while remaining the object of faith for millions of adherents.

In the ancient schools of art, the crucial scene of the Buddha's first sermon is symbolized by a wheel seen from the front and having only eight spokes: this refers to the dharma, the Law taught by
84 Sakyamuni. The wheel *(chakra)* is also the emblem of the universal king, the first of his seven jewels. The Buddha himself declared: "I am going to Kashi in order to set the Wheel in motion," which in Buddhist language means to "preach the Order of things." But it is not until approximately the fourth century A. D. that iconography definitely seized upon this significant imagery. Often the praying dis-
30 ciples are no longer represented; all attention is concentrated on Sakyamuni, who outlines with his
74 two hands held in front of his chest the gesture *(mudra)* of setting in motion the Wheel of the Law *(dharmachakra)*. And just as the gesture of calling the Earth as a witness *(bhumishparshamudra)* is in
74 itself evocative of the miracle of the Awakening, the *dharmachakramudra* is characteristic of the first
67 sermon of the Buddha. He can be seen seated either cross-legged *(padmasana)* or in majesty, his two
69 feet on the ground, as he already would be in the heaven of the Thirty-three Gods.

1 However, the complete theme—well represented starting from the time of the Guptas (fourth to sixth centuries)—includes in addition to this *mudra* the representation of a wheel, generally seen
73 from the side, with two kneeling deers, also in profile, contemplating it. If only the latter part is shown, it is enough to mean that the scene is taking place in the Deer Park of Sarnath, and that it is the First Sermon.

Five disciples do not amount to much, especially in view of the fact that they have a vocation for sanctity rather than for action. It will be enough though, to attract postulants. In fact, this is a common thing in India, even today, where a growing number of followers join a master. In the Brahmanic environment, students came to settle for a variable length of time in a hermitage of note. The novelty with Buddha is the acceptance of lay people and even lay women *(upasaka)*. The first one to come is Yashas, the young son of a banker, whose life is curiously similar to that of the Buddha when he was in his father's palace. Sickened by a life of pleasure, he crosses a river and takes refuge with Sakyamuni, who, without waiting much, ordains him a monk. Shortly thereafter, Yashas's father, who is looking for his son, also reaches the hermitage. After having heard the teaching of the Buddha, he adopts his doctrine and becomes the first lay zealot of the Buddhist community. In the Indian style, he brings all his family, women included: everybody joins the new faith. This nucleus is joined by other "sons of good families." As a result, before the end of the rainy season, the community numbers sixty monks and many lay people.

In accordance with his plans, the Buddha then orders these monks to go their separate ways, to make long tours of the country while preaching the Middle Path, and not to come back before the end of the dry season. As to himself, he goes back to Uruvilva, as he had decided—but not without having to repel Mara once again, who tries to make him doubt his liberation without another rebirth.

On the way, he meets thirty young men who are quite agitated because they have just had an unpleasant adventure. They had all decided to go to the countryside with their wives, and they had taken along a courtesan for the sole bachelor among them. While the young men were happily bathing in the river, the courtesan stole their valuables left on the bank and ran away. The Buddha simply tells them: "Do you think, O young men, that it is better for you to go looking for that woman or to go looking for yourselves?" Reflecting, they agree that his remark is well grounded, and they listen respectfully to the sermon that the Buddha delivers immediately. Thus thirty new monks have just been recruited.

Sakyamuni follows the way to Uruvilva, where he knows of three important brotherhoods of hermits who are purely Brahmanic and well known for their high Sanskrit culture. Here are awesome adversaries whom he has wanted to confront, and if possible to convince, for a long time. These hermitages are run by three brothers, the Kashyapas, old and suspicious. They greet the Blessed One as if he had been any young roving religious. However, soon their ashram starts to witness strange incidents—described as miraculous by the texts. Two of these wonders attracted the attention of artists. One evening, the Buddha asks permission to spend the night in the cabin where the eldest of the Kashyapas keeps the ritual fire. Though he is warned that a frightful snake *(naga)* considers itself its exclusive guardian, he persists. As soon as he enters the cabin, the *naga* attacks him and throws flames, setting fire to the roof. The Buddha succeeds in vanquishing the monster, makes him coil up in his alms bowl, and the fire goes out. According to the *Mahavastu,* the Kashyapa and his disciples who witnessed this terrifying scene with fear bow before the supernatural power of the Blessed One and convert en masse to the Good Law.

86 Another day, somewhat later in the season, a torrential rain falls on the area and the Nairanjana overflows, rapidly flooding the hermitage with its tumultuous waters. Concerned for the safety of his guest, the oldest Kashyapa puts a boat out on the river and sets out for him. When he finally reaches him, he is astonished: the Buddha is in the process of going back and forth—on dry feet—along the walk *(chankrama)* of tiles where he usually meditates while walking and which is floating on the wa-
68 ters. It may be in honor of this "miracle" that a similar walk was built in Sarnath (at a later period) on which the steps the Buddha is said to have taken are represented by pink lotuses in blossom. In any event, the supremacy of the Buddha is recognized by the other hermits of Uruvilva—those of the two neighboring hermitages—which (according to the *Mahavagga*) adds twelve hundred and fifty new converts to the five hundred already enlisted after the victory of the Buddha over the *naga.*

The time has come for the Buddha to return to Rajagriha, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha. There are two reasons: first, he has promised King Bimbisara, who had greeted him in such a friendly way, that he would return when he had found the truth; then, he must gather all his followers to

organize his community in a concrete way, and it is only in the capital that he will find necessary and sufficient funds to do this. The season is propitious to travels: the weather is dry and nice, without excessive heat. The Buddha and the new converts set out.

They arrive at Rajagriha at the full moon of the month of December/January. Advised of their arrival, Bimbisara—who is twenty-nine years old—receives them in his palace. Moved by the words of the Buddha, the king asks to be accepted as a lay faithful. Moreover, desiring to keep the community near his capital, he offers to the monks and their master the Bamboo Garden *(venuvana)*, the first real estate gift made by a lay person—followed by many others during the lifetime of the Buddha, and throughout the centuries after his death. Thus, not only does he have learned hermits of great repute—the Kashyapa brothers—on his side, but he can also rely on the protection of a king.

77

However, what matters most to him is to give his community a solid structure and to communicate to his closest disciples the fruit of his reflections, which are getting deeper and deeper. Two new disciples, quite prominent ones, join him then. Leaving a Brahmanic sect where they had not found satisfactory answers to the questions they were asking themselves, they had been approached by chance by one of the monks of the Buddhist community and, curious as well as attracted, they came to judge for themselves.

They have been friends since childhood, both scions of rich Brahmin families. They studied brilliantly together; a great future was in the offing for them. One is called Shariputra, and his friend Maudgalyayana. As soon as they come before the Buddha, the latter proclaims: "Among my disciples, they will be the head pair, the fortunate two; one (Shariputra), the chief of those who have a great intelligence; the other (Maudgalyayana), the chief of those who have magic powers" *(Mahavagga* and *Mahavastu)*. It seems that these two personages actually lived, just as Sakyamuni did. They followed the Master in all his activities, but it is said that they did not want to survive him. Relics to which their two names are attached have been found in the digs on the site of Sanchi, where two monumental reliquaries (stupas) had been erected in their honor, perhaps during the third century B.C.

Thus the nucleus of the community is strengthened anew by two remarkable personalities. A third great disciple will soon join them: Mahakashyapa. He too is the son of a Brahmin of Magadha, so rich that he could have been a rival to the king had he not had a sense of measure and respect. But he has to face a personal problem: just as was the case with the Buddha in Kapilavastu, he is disgusted by the pleasures of the flesh; married against his will to a beautiful girl from Vaishali who shares his feelings, he decides in agreement with her to live in perfect chastity. After twelve years, they decide to separate and "to leave for religion," each going his/her own way. At that point, he applies to enter the community. The Buddha accepts him with joy—and he does so wisely, for after the *parinirvana*, Mahakashyapa will play an important part in maintaining the integrity of the Good Law. Legend seized upon the figure of Mahakashyapa and stressed his fidelity, claiming that he had himself enclosed within a hill of Magadha where, in a state of ecstasy, he is still waiting for the coming of the future Buddha, Maitreya, in order to give him the monastic mantle of Sakyamuni.

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The stay in Rajagriha is therefore a very satisfactory one. Not only is there a whole crowd of disciples and lay faithful gathered around the teaching of the Buddha, but it includes members of high quality from the viewpoint of spirituality and intellect as well as from the standpoint of material riches generously given for the purchase of grounds and buildings. All is given in the form of gifts, since the monks would not accept money. But the fact is that the community is now sheltered during the rainy season, and that it can carry out its mission as completely as possible.

It can be imagined that all this organization did not go on without creating some disturbance in its Brahmanic environment. Indeed, the Brahmin families had had some difficulties in settling and remaining in these areas that were still poorly Aryanized. Thus they were all the more jealous of their authority and were not inclined to view favorably the best among themselves leaving their ancestral rituals in order to join a religious movement so different from their own—moreover, doing so within a heterogeneous group in which all castes were mixed without any concern for the sacrosanct ritual purity to which the Brahmins were so strictly attached. Besides which, how could those families stand the fact that what Sakyamuni was preaching—nondesire, noncoupling, refusal to be born—would inescapably lead to the end of the lineage, since there would be no children? Nothing could have been more important in their eyes than that each couple beget sons, in order to perpetuate the ritual fire, symbol of the home.

The fact is that the Buddha who called himself the Great Compassionate One was not concerned with this problem. What matters to him above all is to free the individual from the horrible servitude of rebirth. What he proposes therefore is an individualistic solution that seems to be the only efficient one to him. As a consequence, he posits as a principle that only the monks who have reached a high degree of faith and practice can reach the ultimate stage of nonrebirth.

The texts echo the discontent of the traditionalists: "People murmured, got upset and angry." But the Buddha replied, "Who can reasonably hold anything against those who convert through the true Law?" It is true though that while he attracted many disciples, his rule barred the entrance into the Buddhist community of those whose ordination would cause grave harm to their kin.

In any event, did he not apply his theories in his own case? Had he not, for seven years already, left home, entrusting his wife and son to his father? Up to that time, it does not seem that he was concerned about it: none of his sermons refer to the matter. But he did not foresee the consequences of the fame he had acquired, which had even reached his native clan, the Sakyas. For if he has not yet taken the initiative of returning to his native area, the Buddha will have to go there soon. His father, King Shuddhodana, sends him an invitation to come and preach the Good Law.

It is brought to him by a childhood friend of the Master, Udayin, who is also the son of the royal
32 chaplain. Certain texts mention that he was accompanied by Chandaka, his former squire, who had,
36 in spite of himself, taken part in the Great Departure. As soon as they arrive at the community of Rajagriha, they convert together with all their retinue and ask for ordination—forgetting by the same token (so it is claimed) the mission that they were to carry out. But the gods take it upon themselves to refresh their memories, while inciting Sakyamuni to accept the invitation of his father. He

finally consents and after everything has been readied for the trip, the Buddha and his numerous retinue set off for the sixty stages (one a day) of the road to Kapilavastu. Thus they spend two months on the roads, but the season is propitious: it is the fall, with a fairly even temperature and without frequent rains.

All the company halts outside the city in the Park of the Banyan Fig Trees. According to the most ancient tradition, King Shuddhodana had wanted to greet his son and, riding in his royal chariot drawn by four horses, he was on his way when he saw religious coming into the city to beg for food, and he turned back because all his rancor had reawakened against this son unworthy of his caste, who had renounced the throne and violated all the ancestral rules, preferring to beg for his food and live with people of heterogeneous origins rather than raising his only son within the good traditions and living among his peers. According to the same legend, the Buddha understands that he must reassure his father and sends him a messenger in turn. Then determined to convince the Sakyas of his su-
85 pernatural powers, he creates "at the level of a fan palm tree" a magic walk *(chankrama)* on which he comes and goes with perfect ease. The whole court is there, as well as the whole clan—and all, joining hands, exclaim that it is a miracle. He has won.

The Buddha starts preaching immediately. But here, in Kapilavastu, the situation is different. The Master knows his listeners intimately: his father, his aunt and adoptive mother who raised him, his wife and their son Rahula, his half brother Nanda, his uncles, cousins, childhood friends. Though they have known him well, are they going to understand his message as well as his disciples and zealous followers who came voluntarily to him? Indeed, his aunt, who is tenderhearted, is already under his spell. However, his father remains quite reserved.

His wife, Yashodhara, is also reticent. She has waited so long for this return, counted so much on the charms that had kept him at her side for such a long time, that she carefully adorned and painted her face to greet him at her best. Pushing Rahula toward the Buddha, she imagines that he will feel paternal tenderness for their son and that he will be a good husband again. Artists have depicted that
103 scene, never better than in Ajanta (cave XVII, fifth century), in which the Predestined, nimbed, dressed in his saffron monastic cloak and holding his alms bowl in his hand, bows his head before the mother and child who are standing in front of him. The "hierarchical" perspective enlarges the Sakya Monk out of proportion and for the avowed purpose of affirming his preeminence.

It is a definitive refusal. The Buddha does not intend his son to be—as he himself was—dragged into a life of pleasure. And when Rahula—who is seven years old—claims (clearly pushed by his mother) his inheritance, he takes this literally: instead of letting him stay in the palace, he takes him bodily into his hermitage of the Fig Trees, has his head shaven, and ordains him. Rahula, by the way, is agreeable and will remain faithful to the rule.

For the second time, King Shuddhodana is deprived of a successor. He has a last resource: the young and handsome Nanda, half brother of the Buddha. As it happens, he is engaged to a beautiful young girl of the capital. The wedding is planned, the future palace ready to shelter the young couple, Nanda about to be appointed crown prince. But the Buddha also wants to pull him away from a

life of pleasure and uses a stratagem for this purpose. One day, as Nanda is walking about the city
104 with his fiancée, the Master starts begging. Seeing him, Nanda hastens to take his alms bowl, carrying it all the way to the hermitage while following his older brother step by step. As soon as he gets there, the barber sets to shave his hair and the monks dress him with the robe and mantle of the rule, all this being accomplished at top speed. That forced conversion was not an immediate success. For a long time, Nanda pined for the attractions of the life he had given up against his will. The Buddha exerted himself in persuading him. And he finally understood the need to detach oneself from desire, until one becomes, in the Buddhist tradition, an example of the spiritual quest pursued to its end, and overcomes the obstacles one has erected due to a stupid self-blinding.

As to Shuddhodana, the opinions are at variance. Some texts claim that he converted together with his wife and sister-in-law, but these are late versions. On the other hand, he seems to have understood the (more or less voluntary) enrollment of five hundred young Sakyas, members of the noble caste who, asking for the ritual skull shaving and monastic robe, joined the ranks of the Buddhist community. But at that point, an incident occurred showing that the Buddha actually wanted the castes to mix, an unprecedented concept in the Brahmanic tradition and the most original point in the Buddhist doctrine. Indeed, when all these young men decided to have their skull shaven by Upali the barber, who was their servant—of a low class, as was suitable—they found out that he was gone.

What happened? they asked, somewhat irritated.

Upali simply went to the Buddha in order to ask something: now that all his masters were leaving the worldly life at the same time, he found himself without anyone to serve. Since, according to the Law preached by the Blessed One, the castes have been abolished and the same nirvana is proposed to all, could he not also become a monk? "Can men such as myself attain the joys of liberation?" he asks. The answer is immediate: "The Law of the Buddha belongs equally to all." Without any further delay, the Buddha receives him in the monastic order, uttering the sentence of instant ordination: "Welcome as a *bhikshu!* Devote yourself to the practices of the monks."

Thus, when the young Sakya nobles come to salute the religious at their meeting, they have to show to their former servant the same respect as to the other members of the community, no matter how much their caste pride has to suffer. However, if this new group of five hundred recruits was very appreciated by the Buddhist order, it turned out to become less of a blessing than could have been supposed.

But for the time being, everything is fine: the community is numerous and prosperous; it is solidly implanted in Magadha. Soon, it will spread to the neighboring kingdom of Kosala, whose king is Prasenajit. Indeed, a rich merchant from that kingdom had come to Rajagriha, probably for business, and had listened to the sermons of the Buddha. He appreciated them so much that one day he grew bold enough to plead with the Blessed One, asking him to come to Shravasti (the present Saheet-Mahet), the town of Kosala where he was residing, and to teach the Good Law there. Sakyamuni accepts, under one condition though: he does not want to settle there, with his retinue of monks, in a temporary residence; they need large grounds, inhabitable and well located, such as those they al-

ready have in three places: the Deer Park near Benares, the Park of the Banyan Fig Trees near Kapilavastu, and the Bamboo Garden in Rajagriha. And, in order to make sure that this new domain will be perfectly fit for their needs, he asks the merchant to go back to Shravasti with the great disciple Shariputra, who will know better than a layman—no matter how fervent—how to choose and prepare the hermitage.

As soon as they arrive at Shravasti, they go on a search and choose the most beautiful pleasure grounds near the city. The park belongs to Prince Jeta ("Victor"), whom they approach as soon as they can. But the prince has no reason for agreeing to their request: he knows neither the Buddha nor his Law—and he wants to keep his park. He thinks that he has a way out, and responds with a jest: in order for him to part with his grounds, his petitioners would have to cover the entire surface with gold. The rich merchant, who like many of his colleagues in those days is also a banker, has a tremendous religious fervor. Therefore he accepts without arguing. And one can soon watch a quite unusual event: chariots drawn by humpback oxen bring to the Garden of Jeta (Jetavana) heaps of gold coins. Professional pavers carry them to the grounds while the unhitched oxen lie down to rest. Thus have the sculptors of the stupa balustrade in Bharhut depicted the scene, without forgetting to show the merchant-banker plying a water jar (symbolizing the gift) and consecrating the donation of the Jetavana to the Buddha and his community.

In this enchanting environment, whose charms are celebrated in the texts, the Buddha settles down and organizes community life. King Prasenajit becomes his frequent listener and faithful friend. It does not seem, however, that he formally converted. But he is the brother-in-law of Shuddhodana, and uses the services of the same ambassador, Udayin, who resides alternately in Shravasti and Kapilavastu—and he advised Shuddhodana of the presence of his son in his own kingdom.

The inhabitants of the area flock to the hermitage. At Shravasti, as elsewhere before, the monastic rule will impose its rhythm all through the days, seasons, and years.

There will be slightly over forty years of rainy seasons, marking the periodical regrouping of all the mendicant preachers who had been walking the roads spreading the Good Law. That long period has been characterized by individual conversions, at least fifty of them, though none of them was as remarkable as those already related. As to group or even mass conversions (80,000 mayors of the 80,000 villages of the kingdom of Magadha), they mostly represent the exaggerations for propaganda purposes of later texts. They touch very diversified audiences: rural folks, city people, at times followers of Brahmanic or heterodox sects—the latter not always being honest and attempting to trap the Master, who obviously outwits them all and shows an infinite patience and a faultless benevolence. Accounts, which are probably more edifying than factual, go as far as to mention murder attempts against the person of Sakyamuni, all failing disastrously, needless to say.

During the same period, Sakyamuni follows the rule that he himself has established. Every morning, he leaves holding his alms bowl, to beg his sole meal of the day. He takes great pains to beg only in the neighborhoods of the towns or villages where his quest will not cause hardship to the poorest homes. At times, he is the object of very touching expressions of devotion. The most famous, often

depicted in the iconography, comes from a small boy at play with sandpies. Not owning anything, but wishing to give him something, the child gravely and respectfully proffers a handful of dust, which the Master collects in his bowl with as much gratitude as if it had been an offering of food. And the texts add that the innocent giver will be reborn as the famous emperor Ashoka (ca. 264–ca. 227), who will protect Buddhism.

The Master goes about frequently during the dry season, though he does not go farther than a certain perimeter, that of the kingdom where he has implanted his doctrine. He is seen, of course, in Shravasti and Rajagriha as well as in Samkashya (Sankisa, district of Faukbonhabad), in Vaishali, in the territory of the Licchavis, and in that of the Mallas in Kushinagara.

But he does not travel alone, for he takes along on each trip many monks and disciples, escorted—all castes being mixed—by enthusiastic candidates as well as the curious and the hesitant looking for information. It even happens that farmers and landlords, filling their chariots with stocks of salt, oil, rice, and various foods, follow the pilgrims and pedestrians in long columns; thus, they tell themselves, whenever the local resources happen to be scarce or even nonexistent, we will be able to offer Him and his disciples a meal, and gain merits.

When he returns to one of his customary residences, he receives at times the visit of one of the local kings, whom he all knows personally—and none of whom, apparently, forgets the fact that he comes from the noble caste, or Kshatriya. In Rajagriha, the principal center of his activities, he sees Bimbisara, who was the first one to receive him without any reservation. Later Bimbisara's son, Ajatashatru, guilty of his father's murder (parricide is not a rare occurrence in Indian history) comes to him, and the clemency of the Buddha can be measured by the fact that he welcomes this unworthy heir of a throne who has cut short the life of one of his dear friends and protectors; such an attitude is motivated by the fact that Ajatashatru, conscious of having committed an unnatural deed, has come to Sakyamuni to seek appeasement from his remorse.

107 In Shravasti, it was Prasenajit who had overwhelmed him with kindness and caused a "Hall of the Law" to be built; in that city, many conversions, often marked by prodigies, are commemorated by stupas. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuan-tsang saw their ruins around the middle of the seventh century.

When these royal personages decide to visit the Master in his hermitage for one reason or another, they follow an unchanging protocol, often depicted in ancient iconography. The king would take along, grouped in the yard of his palace, his ministers and courtiers, at times his wives, not to mention his servants, a few soldiers chosen to escort him, bearers—male and female—of beneficent insignia, and a band whose musicians were selected for their ability to play instruments used in marches: conches, flutes, portable drums, cymbals, and gongs.

The king rode a horse or an elephant and came out of the palace, then the city, preceded by musicians, surrounded by standards, followed by the platoon of riders—all of them dignitaries—behind whom came a long file of pedestrians. The female bearers of royal insignia walked in front, one carrying the royal sandals, the other his sword in its scabbard. Around him, people waved flyswatters while a servant held a parasol over his head.

When he came near the hermitage, he alighted and placed on the ground his tiara and other insignia of royal dignity. Prostrating himself before the Master, he showed his humility. Then all re-
108 grouped around the Buddha, to listen to his teaching. This showy and refined audience was not necessarily the favorite one of Sakyamuni; however, monks also took part in them with the great disciples Shariputra and Ananda in the first row. With the consent of the Master, they asked him many questions to which he carefully replied. These long dialogues that the texts endeavored to relate (or imitate) enlightened the neophytes about his doctrine better than purely dialectical sermons could have done.

Yet, if the Good Law found a deep receptivity among the listeners of the Buddha, whether they had already converted—as the monks had—or were simply attracted by the novelties contained in the Four Noble Truths, a sly opposition, at times overt and violent, did not cease to agitate the society of these areas where Brahmanic ritualism prevailed—perhaps with greater vigor than in areas located farther to the West, which had been Aryanized earlier and more completely.

In Magadha and Kosala, many sects were fiercely competing to attract as many followers as possible. These sects could not help but resent a new rival which had developed so daringly and, moreover, claimed to upset the social (therefore ritual) order, bringing a definitive solution to the transmigration of the souls, while they themselves were incapable of so doing.

Again, it was at the initiative of King Prasenajit of Kosala that a memorable disputation occurred between the Buddha and six heads of various sects. The encounter took place near the Jeta Park, a neutral ground of sorts. The surprising event was the presence among these six adversaries of the founder of a religion that is still in existence nowadays: Jainism. It was Vardhamana, a member of the Licchavi clan, born of a Brahmin family residing in Vaishali (present Besarh), about sixteen years after Sakyamuni (i. e., at the presumed date of 540 B. C.). As is the case for the Buddha, his historical existence is factual, and their careers have common points at the outset, though they are fundamentally divergent in their respective doctrines.

As the six heads of sects are together in their opposition to him, what will be the attitude of Sakyamuni? Obviously, he cannot use a speech; no matter how irrefutable it would seem to him, it would not convince his opponents or shake their beliefs or social system. Criticism would not work either, since it would not have any hold on people who are clearly in bad faith. All things considered, none of this could have the desirable impact of giving him an absolute victory over his antagonists. There remains a weapon of which he disapproved in principle and that he had forbidden to his disciples: prodigies, magic, not to say illusion. And since he places himself above all this because of his supreme wisdom, he decides to use it if need be.

All takes place as foreseen: after a long bout of oratory, at the end of which everybody maintains his position, the Buddha starts to preach the Good Law, seated on a huge lotus that he has raised through magic—at least this is one of the traditions of the Northwest, where the scene is usually so depicted. There is also a simplified version showing the Blessed One moving through the air—since levitation is a familiar thing to him—simultaneously causing tumultuous waters to flow beneath his

110 feet and tongues of fire above his shoulders. We see in this manifestation the two "miracles" that have already been described: the walking on the waters and the victory over the fire. But such prodigies seem too innocuous and too well known. Which is why, in order to gain forcefully the adherence of his enemies and to raise the enthusiasm of his followers, he causes the extraordinary vision of "a
109 thousand" Buddhas to appear in the air, all looking like him in their most significant gestures
111 (appeasement, argumentation, preaching, etc.). It must be understood from the outset that "thousand" means "an infinity," and secondly that this version is a late one in the texts as well as in iconography.

Be that as it may, Sakyamuni is supposed to be the great victor of this competition, the description and illustration of which have dazzled many generations of Buddhists. Close to a thousand years later, the good Hiuan-tsang still had tears in his eyes when he was shown, a short distance north of the eastern gate of the Jetavana, the precise spot where the Buddha had faced the fearsome dialectics of his adversaries and where he caused that astonishing multiplication of his own personage, projected in all directions, invading the sky and radiating with an irresistible power.

Another episode, just as astonishing, belongs to the cycle of Shravasti; it is dated either before the "Great Miracle" or after. And though it is connected on a human level with the psychological trauma caused by the premature death of the mother, it is clearly meant to be quite edifying on the moral and religious level. It is, in fact, an episode in the life of the Buddha. We remember that Queen Maya, the first wife of King Shuddhodana, died seven days after having given birth to the future Buddha, and that since that time, she dwelt in the heavens of the Thirty-three Gods. As a good son, the Buddha could not be indifferent to her fate, no matter how enviable it seemed to be: it was obvious that this fate was not perfect—in spite of appearances—since she had not yet been initiated in the Good Law. Until that time, he had not been able to take care of this, but the moment had come, sixteen years—it is believed—after he had attained the Awakening.

He chooses the three months of the rainy season to pay her a visit. Thanks to his supernatural pow-
89 ers, he easily rises in the sky to the dwelling of the Thirty-three, teaches them the Four Noble Truths, and at the same time instructs his mother so that she too can be freed from the cycle of rebirth. His duty having been taken care of, he comes down to India on the site of Samkashya (present Sankisa, in the middle valley of the Ganges), using an endless triple staircase, often depicted in iconography and carefully described: the central span being made of solid gold, the left side of rock crystal, and the right of white silver. The Buddha preempts the middle steps, escorted by the king of the gods, Indra,
108 and by Brahma, who insist on accompanying him back to earth.

When reading these narrations, which tirelessly describe wondrous events worthy of fairy tales, it becomes obvious that we are dealing with two strata that are superimposed and mingled at the same time. First there is the human aspect of the Buddha's life: the proofs of his actual existence, the historical personages he encounters, all of which bring him very close to us. Then there are the prodigies, miracles, traps too easily avoided, intrigues promptly perceived, accidents or ambushes that are avoided, tricks used without much finesse in order to make him the perpetual winner in any set of

circumstances—all this also has its own power of seduction and brings understanding and adherence to a sincere faith within reach of the simplest people.

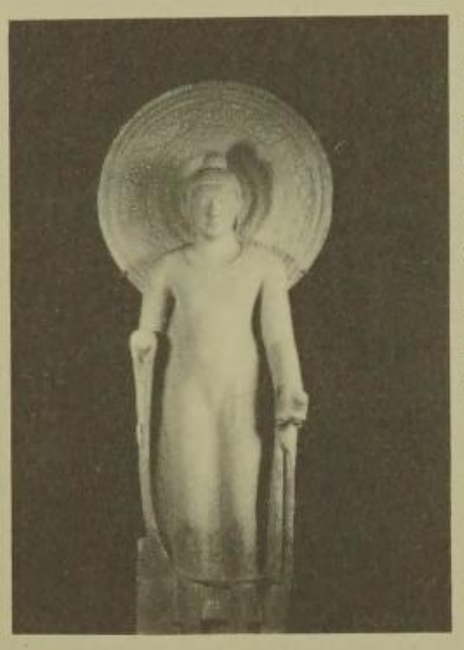
Edifying tales are countless and we are compelled to quote only the most significant, those that have been illustrated the most often, without doubt selected by pious donors. There are all kinds of tales, but we note that their number decreases as the Buddha's career and age unfold. One of them, often made use of, relates a story taking place in Vaishali, in the quasi-autonomous country of the Licchavis. The hero is a monkey. It is known that in India there are many monkeys, and there is nothing surprising in their appearance in the *jataka* and in the legend of the life of the Buddha. That particular animal, full of good intentions, went to the top of a palm tree, periodically tapped by men, in order to seek a sweet and thick liquid called *madhu.* And he did this in order to humbly make an offering to the Blessed One. Delighted by the success of his efforts, he began to leap about wildly and fell into a pit, where he drowned—which earned him an immediate and improved rebirth.

Then, there are narrations about courtesans. The most famous, again in Vaishali, concerns the gentle Amrapali, who contributes in her way to the splendor and luxury of the city. Richly kept, she invites the Buddha and his community to a luncheon in her house, and he accepts without hesitation. In spite of the protests of jealous young nobles who are her occasional lovers, Amrapali goes ahead with her plans. The monks and the Master come to her house and partake of a meal specially prepared for them, at the end of which the courtesan offers them the property of the Mango Park. To express his gratitude, the Buddha treats her to a beautiful homily and hastens to settle down in the park, where the monkeys had dug a huge pond for him.

Not all tales are so euphoric. Another courtesan, for instance, tried—in vain anyway—to make people believe that the Buddha had made her pregnant. But how could one believe such calumnies, obviously spread by his enemies, the heterodox sects?

However, the life of the Buddha was nearing its end.

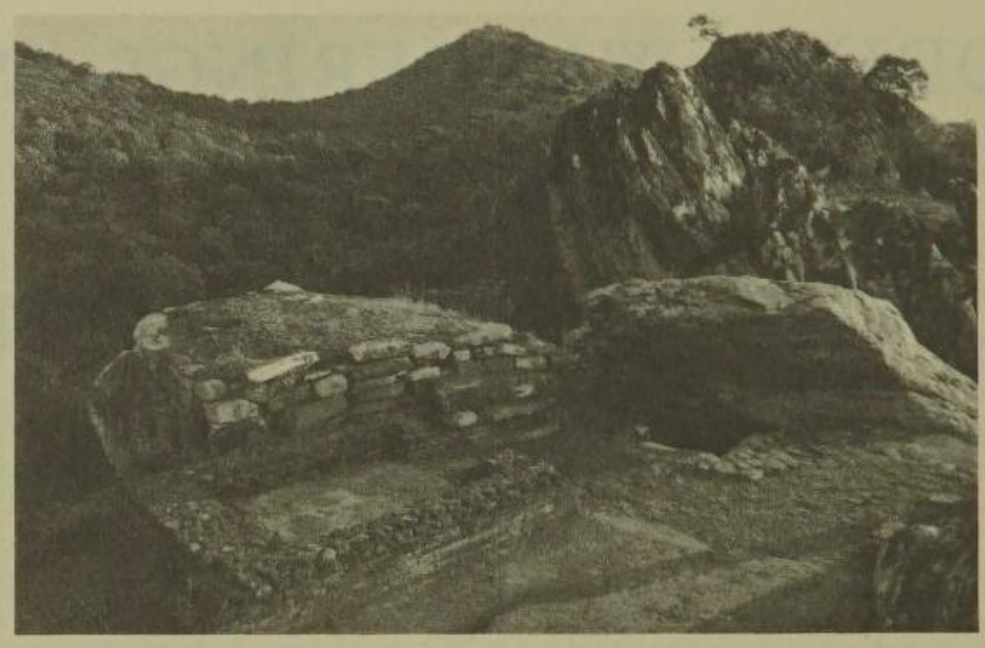
BUDDHA's WANDERINGS AS PREACHER OF THE "GOOD LAW" AND THE "FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS" – CONVERSIONS AND MIRACLES



76 The standing Buddha Sakyamuni with halo. He has the large nimbus typical of Gupta-period art (see Fig. 73) and wears a monk's robe with a stylized effect not found in Sarnath. The image is the largest known in this style. Statue in red sandstone from Mathura, 5th century, h: 1.83 m. – Formerly in the Indian Museum, Calcutta (no. M. 5), now at the seat of Parliament (Rashtrapati Shavan) in New Delhi.

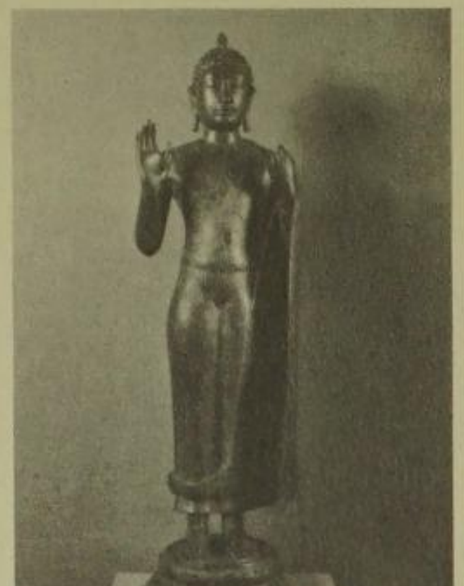
77 This spot, Kushagarapura, near Rajagriha (now Rajgir), is said to have been the site of the Bamboo Garden (Venuvana) which King Bimbisara presented to the future Buddha and where he spent a night. Later this became one of the favorite places of resort of the Buddha, one where he often stayed after his awakening.

78 The Buddha Sakyamuni, slate statue from Gandhara (Pakistan), 3rd–4th century, h: 0.72 m. A characteristic work of the region: gentle folds, as in Hellenic art, wavy hair-style, half-western, half-oriental features (see Fig. 49). – Chandigarh, State Museum (no. 2083).



79 The summit (Gridhrakuta) of a hill above Rajagriha, the ancient capital of King Bimbisara, where the Buddha lived in two natural grottos. Remains of ancient buildings have been found here.

80 An almost six-meter-broad flagged path built on the orders of King Bimbisara in order to reach the summit with ease from the valley, and from the capital Rajagriha. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuan-tsang (7th century) used and described it. Archaeologists say that it is the pathway shown here.



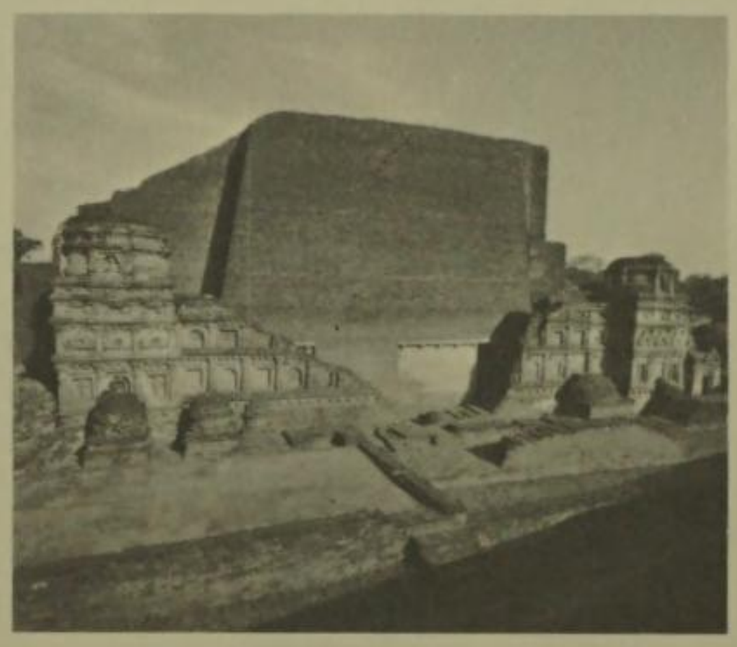
81 The standing Buddha makes the fearlessness gesture *(abhayamudra).* Chola style, 9th–10th century, bronze, h: 8.89 m. One of the 350 bronzes excavated at the site of Hagapattinam (Tamil Nadu, on the southeastern Deccan coast), a former trading-place for ships' cargoes. – Madras, State Museum.

82 Sakyamuni with his first five disciples. The left-hand section of this relief makes the interpretation uncertain, for it could also portray the (forced) conversion of Nanda. Panel from the cladding of a stupa in Nagaryunakonda, right-hand section of the relief. Amaravati school, 3rd–4th century, marble, h: 0.72 m. – Paris, Musée Guimet (no. MG 17069), gift of C. T. Loo.

83 Pataliputra (present-day Patna), which became the capital of Magadha (Bihar) after Rajagriha. The Buddha Sakyamuni came here when it was still the simple village of Pataligrama. The first Haurya ruler (end of the 4th century B. C.) had a palace built here with a large pillared hall inspired by the hypostyle of Darius in Persepolis. The picture shows the bases of the wooden pillars.

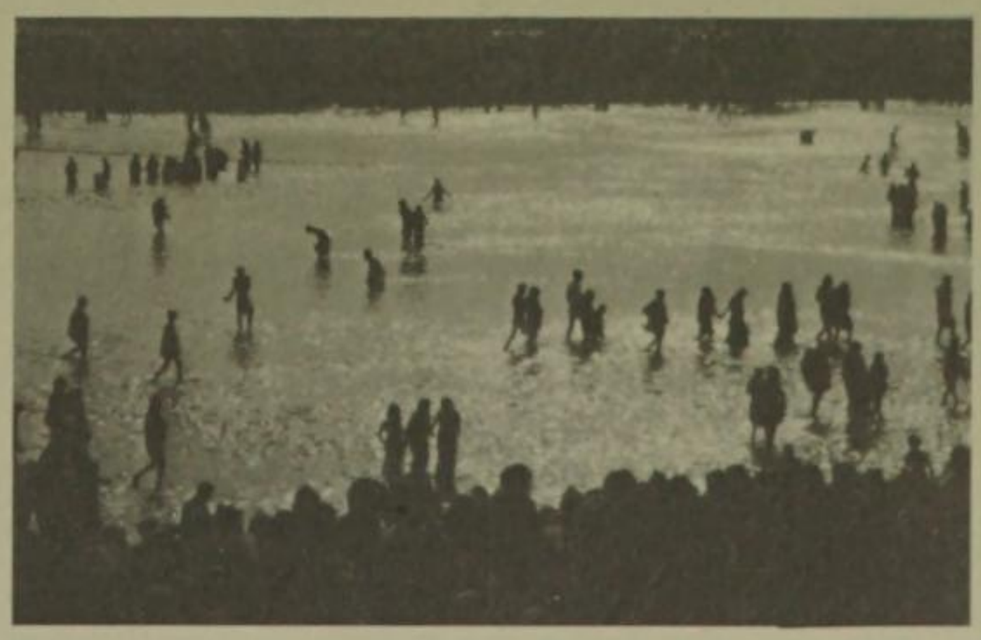
84 A king (chakravartin), "he through whom the wheel *(chakra)* moves," therefore a plunderer. He is surrounded by his seven "jewels" *(ratna):* wheel, columns, wife, sons, minister, horse, elephant. The heavens are raining down four-sided gold pieces *(koti).* Possibly an allusion to Emperor Mandhatta, an incarnation of the Buddha in an earlier life. Panel from the cladding of a stupa in Yaggayjapeta (Amaravati school), 1st century B. C. (?). – Madras, State Museum.

85–86 Two miracles of the Buddha. Above (85), in the Park of the Banyan Trees, at Kapilavastu. In the presence of his father, King Shuddhodana, and the court, the Buddha creates a walkway in the air *(cankrama)* on which he walks up and down to general stupefaction. Below (86), near Uruvilva, close to the river in flood, he makes another walkway above the swollen waters, to the immense astonishment of the anchorites. – Santshi, reliefs on stupa I, c. beginning of the Christian era.



87 A monastery in excavation area 4 at Nalanda. There was only a simple village here in the Buddha's lifetime, one which he often visited. Subsequently the spot became the site of a famous university, which was destroyed by Muslim invaders toward the mid-12th century.

88 An example from our own era: mixed pilgrim columns of all castes at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna (Jumna).



89 After illumination, the divinities appear to honor the Buddha and to advise him on preaching the Good Law. Since this relief features early Buddhist iconography, the Enlightened One is not shown on the seat at the foot of the Bodhi tree. – Santshi, portal of stupa I.

90 One of the three faces of the end column of the southeastern part of the balustrades of the Bharhut stupa. The Yaksha Virudhaka, regent of the south, with hands folded in the *anjali*, or prayer posture. He is dressed and adorned as a prince. 2nd century B.C., reddish-brown sandstone. – Calcutta, Indian Museum.

91 The Yakshimi Chuda, a tree goddess. One of the three faces of the end column of the northwestern part of the balustrade of the Bharhut stupa. 2nd century B.C., reddish-brown sandstone. – Calcutta, Indian Museum.

92 The Buddha Sakyamuni, seated in the lotus posture under the pipal tree, uses his right hand to make the "fearlessness" sign. He has a spiral hair decoration, as found in several sculptures at the same site. His seat is supported by two different lions. To the left, the lightning-bearer, bodhisattva Vayrapani. To the right, an old version of Avalokiteshvara (?). Pink, yellow-spotted sandstone from Mathura. Kushan empire style, 1st–2nd century, h: 0.70 m. – New Delhi Indian National Museum (no. L. 55–25).

93 An episode from the Hamsa-Jataka, an earlier life of the Buddha, who was reborn as King of the Sacred Geese (Hamsa). He is captured, together with his leading general, by the bird-catcher of the king of Benares (Varanasi), placed on a seat, and begins to instruct the king, the queen, and their court in the Law. He receives his freedom in return. – Ajanta, grotto XVII, left-hand wall, 5th century.

94 Detail from the Champeyja-Jataka, which relates an earlier life of the Buddha as serpent-king. He allows himself to be caught by a serpent-keeper of the king of Benares (Varanasi). The detail shows one of the ladies of the court (see Fig. 97). Ajanta, grotto I, 6th century.

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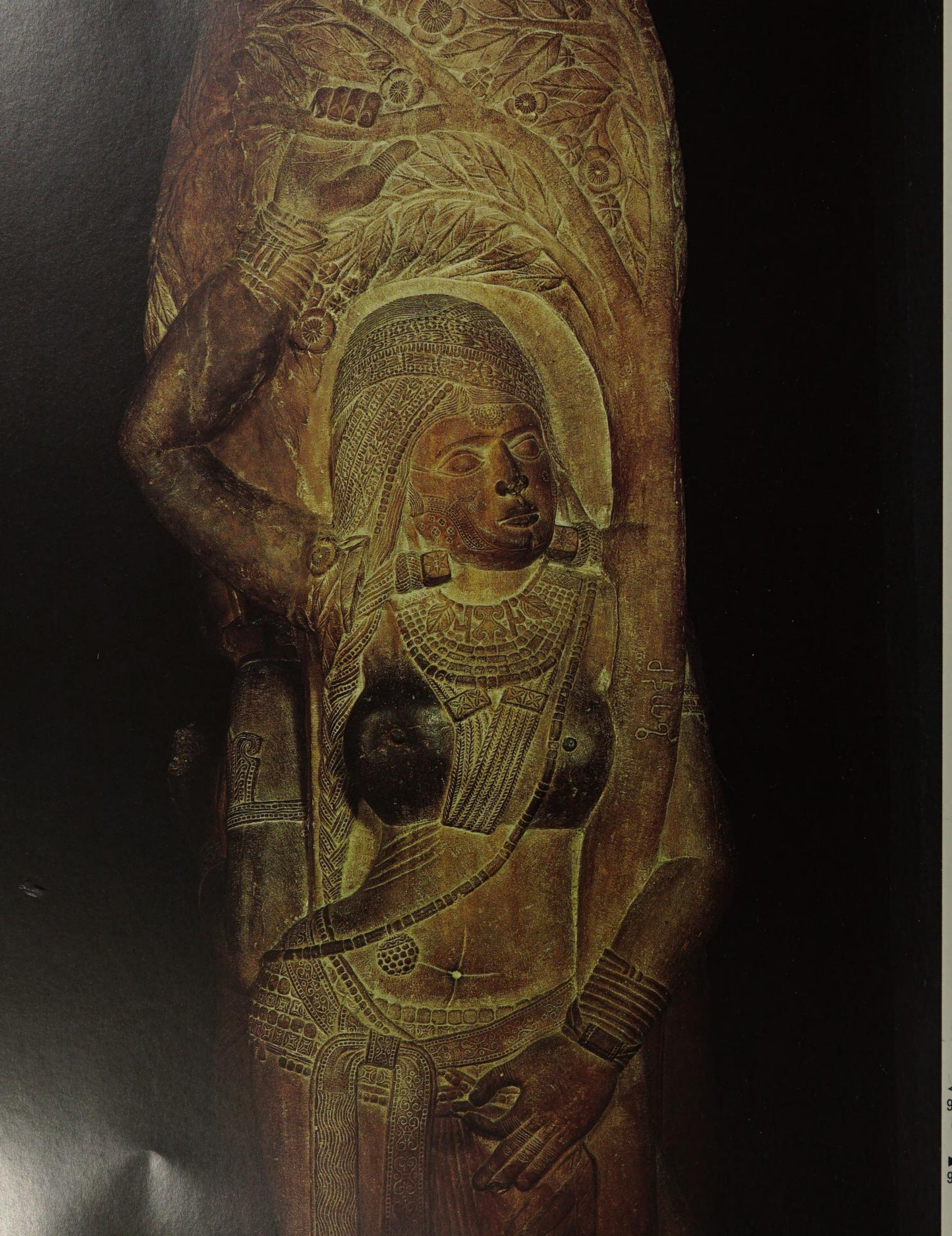
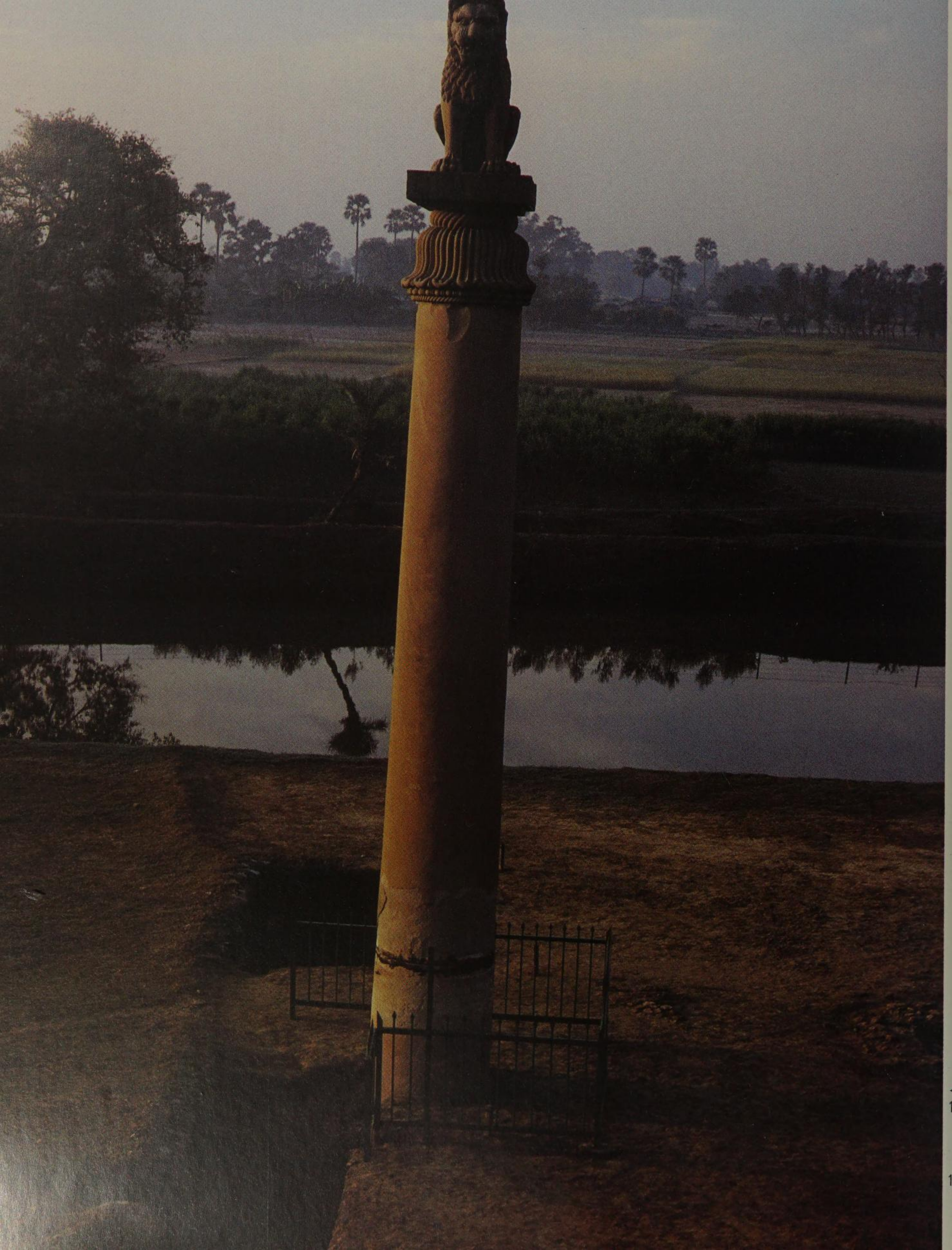




95 The Matiposaka-Jataka relates an earlier life of the Buddha in the form of an elephant. He cared lovingly for his parents, especially for his blind mother, but one day the king's forester forced him to go to the palace of the king of Benares, in order to replace the state elephant which had died there. He decided on a hunger strike. When the king learned of his situation, he set him free. On the right, he rediscovers his parents. – Ajanta, grotto XVII, rear wall, 5th century.

96 The conquest of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) by Simhala. An episode from the war in which we see Simhala's army attacking the man-eaters (with elephants, on horseback, and on foot) which decoyed the shipwrecked onto the rocks of the island. – Ajanta, grotto XVII, right-hand wall, 5th century.

97 One of the last scenes of the Champeyja-Jataka: the serpent-king instructs the king of Benares, who sits listening on his left in a circle of the women of his court and their servants *(kanchukin)*. – Ajanta, grotto I, 6th century.

98 Probably the bodhisattva Gautama before he became the Buddha. His double hair-knot is unusual. Oblique Graeco-Buddhist style from Gandhara (Pakistan), 3rd–4th century. – New Delhi, Indian National Museum.

99 Kaushambi. Remains of the capital of Vatsa, one of the six major cities of the region in the Buddha's lifetime where Udayana ruled (see Fig. 19). Two very learned doctors of Sanskrit Buddhism are said to have lived here for a long time in the 4th century and to have taught publicly: Vasubandhu and his brother Asanga. The city was destroyed during the Hun invasion (c. 500–515), but retained several Buddhist monasteries when Hiuan-tsang passed through here in the 7th century.

100 A mini-procession of donors (?) in a rocky landscape. At their feet four young girls are playing with a spinning top. The scene has not been explained. – Ajanta, grotto II, right-hand sanctuary, beginning of 6th century.

101 Vaishali (present-day Besarh), capital of the Licchavis whom the Buddha loved and praised. Here he received the Mango Park as a gift from the courtesan Amrapali, and an ape brought him wild honey as an offering (see Fig. 41). Emperor Ashoka (3rd century B. C.) ordered a stupa and a commemorative column to be erected there. This column – photographed from the top of the stupa – stands on the bank of a lake which, according to legend, apes excavated for the Buddha.

102 When the (legendary) King Kappina had learned from merchants from Shravasti that Buddha was teaching the Good Law, he made his way there on the back of his elephant, together with his dignitaries (below). When he approached Sakyamuni, he did not descend from his elephant but had his head shaved on it, in order to become a monk (above). The Buddha is seated "in the European fashion" *(pralambapadasana)*. This is one of the oldest representations of this position, which nevertheless became increasingly frequent in subsequent centuries (see Figs. 1, 67, 69). Vayrapani is standing to his right (see Figs. 41, 70). Relief from stupa II in Nagaryunakonda, Amaravati school, 3rd century, marble, h: 1.05 m. – Archaeological Museum of Nagaryunikonda (no. 663/668 A).

103 When Sakyamuni returns to Kapilavastu, he meets his wife Yashodhara, who presents him with his son Rahula. – Ajanta, grotto XVII, rear wall left, 5th century.

104 Preamble to the "conversion" of Nanda. After his morning begging tour, the Buddha returns to his hermitage at Kapilavastu. His younger brother goes with him to carry his alms bowl. – Gandhara (Pakistan). High relief in slate, 2nd–3rd century. – New Delhi, Indian National Museum.

105 The standing Buddha framed by the bodhisattva Manyushri (left) and Avalokiteshvara (right). The original Gupta style (5th century) was adapted, first in Bengal, then in Nepal. – Bodhgaya. – Incised stele at discovery site.

106 Head of the Buddha. Detail of a mural painting showing the "miracle of Shravasti": Sakyamuni uses his magical powers to reproduce himself in innumerable three-dimensional manifestations.

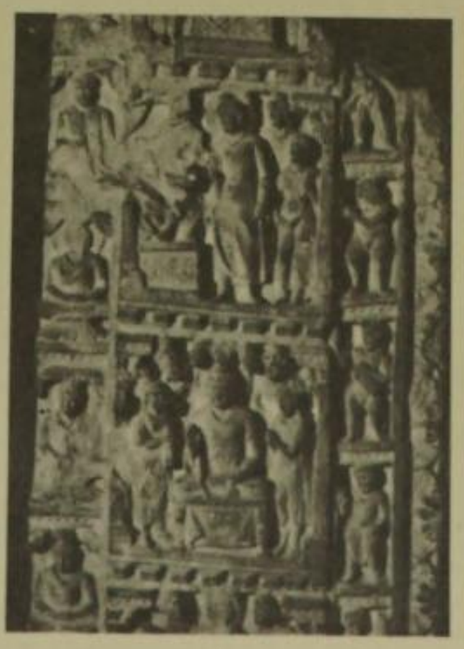
107 Shravasti, the capital of Koshala (present-day Oudh), ruled over by King Prasenajit. The Buddha lived there in the monastery of Yetavana. It declined considerably from the 7th century but persisted into the 12th century. The archaeological excavations revealed many foundations, a great number of which were identifiable.

108 The miracle of Samkashya. When he has been to the heaven of the Thirty-three Gods in order to preach the *Abhidharma* to his mother, Sakyamuni returns to earth in Samkashya, where he is enthroned in majesty and questions his disciple Shariputra (right) about his teaching. A group of the faithful, who have travelled by horse or elephant, listen attentively (left). There are several foreigners among them. – Ajanta, grotto XVII, left-hand wall, 5th century.

109 The great miracle of Shravasti (see Fig. 111). Confronted by the leaders of six sects, the Buddha convinces his audience by producing the three-dimensional vision of a "thousand" Buddhas, all identical with himself. – Ajanta, grotto XVII, right-hand wall, 5th century.

110 Sakyamuni works the two miracles of fire and water. These miracles, also known as the "twin miracles," took place in Kapilavastu before the Sakyas. This statue is nevertheless often identified with Shravasti's great miracle. – Afghanistan, Paitava site, Hellenistic-Buddhist style, c. 3rd century, slate, h: 0.81 m. – Paris, Musée Guimet (no. MG 17 478), J. Hackin loan.

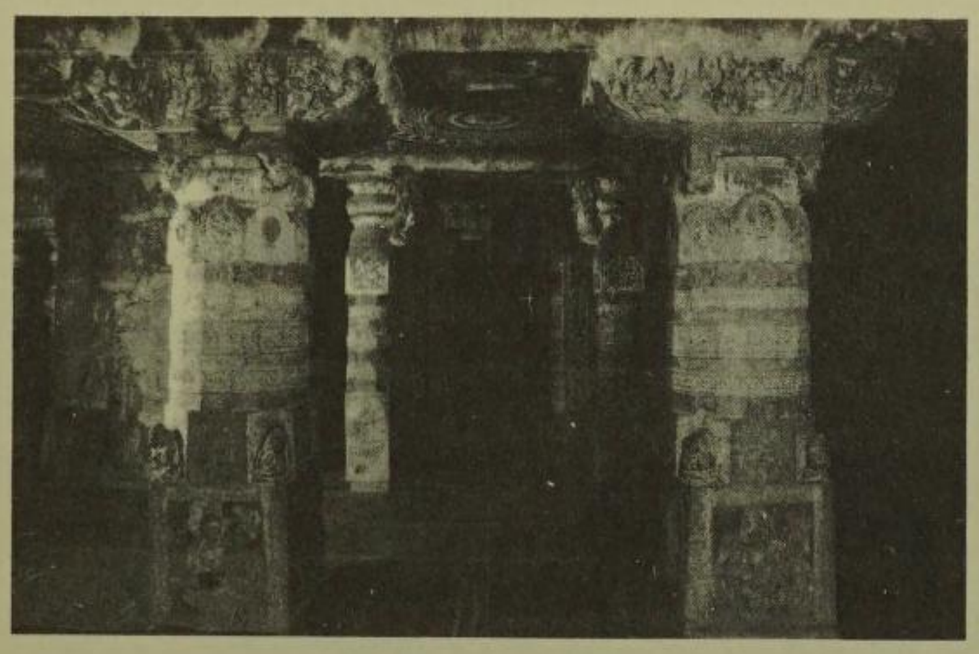
111 Painted decoration on the "thousand Buddhas" theme (possibly more recent than the other paintings in this grotto). The great miracle of Shravasti is portrayed in a popular style which has been called a "pictorial litany" in the form in which it is very often found in Sinkiang and Touen-huang. – Ajanta, grotto II, 6th century.



112 Fragment of a door covered with scenes from the Buddha's life. Graeco-Buddhist style, 3rd century approximately, slate, h: 0.75 m, Afghanistan, Hadda site (near Jallalabad). – Paris, Musée Guimet (no. MG 17 435), J. Barthoux loan.

113 The two lower scenes represent the veneration of the Buddha Sakyamuni; Vayrapani stands to the Master's right in the middle scene. Above is the veneration of the alms bowl which the gods have borne away to their celestial dwelling place. – Arched tympanon, Graeco-Buddhist influence from Gandhara (Pakistan), 2nd–3rd century, bluish slate, h: 0.53 m. – Paris, Musée Guimet (no. MA 2116).

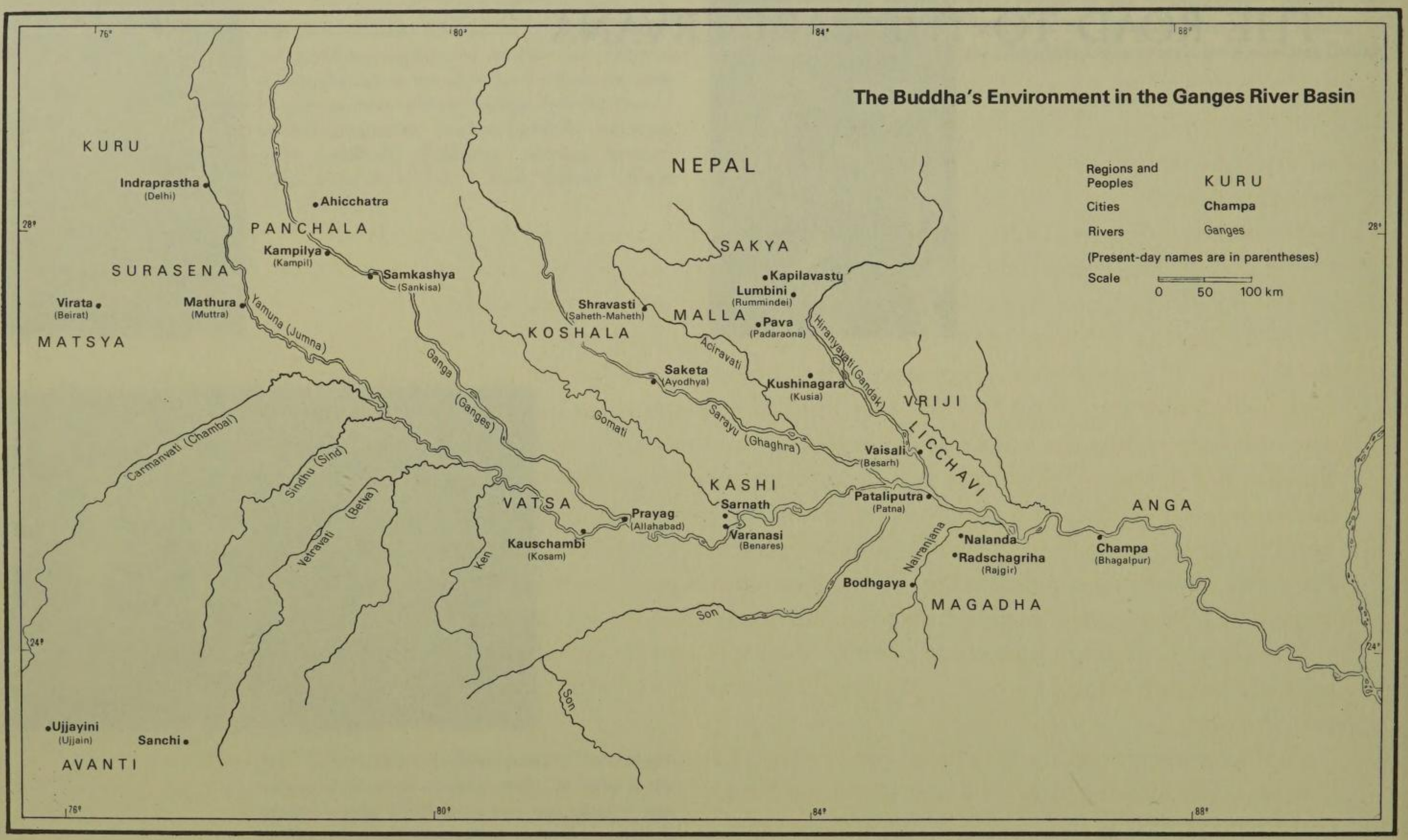
115 Profile of the "transcendent" Buddha Akshobhya of Fig. 58, with characteristic features of the Chandella Dynasty style (mid-northern India).



114 Ajanta, grotto II (6th century). The rear section of the central chamber with the entry to the central chapel, flanked by two side chapels supported by pillars. Everything here is sculpted or painted: pillars, walls, ceilings.

THE ROAD TO THE PARINIRVANA

The Buddha's Environment in the Ganges River Basin



It is precisely during the last part of the Buddha's ultimate human life that the tone of the narrators becomes more and more convincing. Although wondrous events are not shunned, they no longer have a predominant role.

If, toward the end of his life, Sakyamuni happened to evoke the events that marked his own life's journey, he could not help but think about his parents, his family, and his close friends. What happened to them?

His mother, Queen Maya, who died when he was only a week old, has been dwelling ever since in the heaven of the Thirty-three Gods, and he paid her a recent visit there, communicating to her the revelation of the Good Law, which will enable her to avoid a new rebirth.

His father, King Shuddhodana, has been dead for a long time: eight years—it is said—after the Awakening. He probably did not have good memories of him: not only did he come into collision with his father's wish to make a great king out of him, but when he came back to Kapilavastu, he did not receive from him the complete adherence to his doctrine he would have wished. It is true that the Buddha had destroyed the hopes of his father when he "forcefully" converted his half brother Nanda and took away Rahula, his seven-year-old son, to give him a monastic formation right away. Thus Shuddhodana found himself unable to leave his throne to a direct descendant according to custom. However, when he became gravely ill, Sakyamuni hastened again to Kapilavastu, helping his father as best as possible and leading him to a true conversion on his deathbed.

Rahula was ordained a monk at the age of twenty and he has pursued without a hitch a wise and holy life under the high authority of the great disciple Shariputra; later on, he will be the head of all the disciples.

And what happened to the wife of Siddhartha, Yashodhara, the mother of Rahula, their only son? The texts say nothing about the matter. When her husband, the Buddha, pays her a visit at his return to Kapilavastu, it is the last time she is mentioned. Did she rally to the Good Law, or did she fall among the ranks of abandoned wives, whose life was very much like the unenviable fate of widows?

This did not happen to his aunt and adoptive mother, Mahaprajapati, who had been taken as a wife by Shuddhodana right after the death of Maya. As soon as the king died, the widow hastened to apply for admission in the Buddhist order. This created a problem. Until then, the Buddha had not thought about establishing a female community alongside that of the monks. Like all the Indian religious of his time, he was quite wary of the disadvantages this could have entailed. He first refused and, in order to escape from the insistence of his aunt, left Kapilavastu for his residence of Vaishali.

Mahaprajapati did not give in easily. She had her head shaved, donned monastic garb, and led an active campaign among the women of the kingdom who wanted to consecrate themselves to the monastic life. They went as a group, walking on foot, to Vaishali and appeared as supplicants before Sakyamuni—still he remained reticent. The great disciple Ananda had to intervene in their favor for him to finally accept. Though he imposed on them a rule that was more severe than the one followed by the monks, was it not for them a better status than that of the widows, since the latter practically

ceased to exist in the social order? Under the new conditions, they could at least be integrated in a group, live in devotion, contribute to the prosperity of the Buddhist order. They surely accepted much more willingly the freely adopted constraints of the monastic life than those that would have been imposed on them by their families, the latter being always in a hurry to deprive them of their prerogatives of house mistresses, to banish them to a merciless and frugal retreat, and to add to the sorrow of separation from their husbands an unbearable and endless solitude. For a widow, excluded from the domestic rituals and not permitted to remarry, could only wait for death, hoping to be reborn into a new life where she could possibly meet again with her equally reborn husband—though without being sure of truly recognizing him.

To all these losses or radical changes in his family the Buddha must add the loss of his dear friend and protector, King Bimbisara of Magadha. For—as was too often the case in the history of India—the latter was jailed by his son and heir, Ajatashatru, who was impatient to accede to the throne. And this unworthy son ordered that his father be left to die of starvation.

There was worse. We remember how during his first return to Kapilavastu, Sakyamuni had obtained from his father permission to enroll five hundred young noble Sakyas among his monks. Besides depriving the clan of its most dynamic and gifted members, that event would have the disastrous effect of ruining the kingdom and delivering it without defense into the hands of its neighboring enemies, who destroyed it utterly. Among these Sakyas, there happened to be one, called Devadatta, a young first cousin of the Buddha, who created many problems for the latter.

Having a difficult nature—wily, envious, proud, ambitious, though intent on his studies—and having acquired supernatural powers (i.e., magic) as well as the ability to get the attention of the lay people, Devadatta started to think about succeeding Sakyamuni (who was seventy-two years old) at the head of the entire community; in other words, to enjoy in his turn—as soon as possible—an equal power and a fame as great and even superior. In brief, he belongs to a type of individual who has existed since the beginning of time.

For a start, he enters into a dialogue with the Buddha, arguing that, being over seventy years old, the Buddha is too old to carry such a heavy burden. He quite obviously needs someone to replace him, younger, therefore more solid and more enterprising. No need to look for such a one: he has found him, himself, Devadatta. Let the Buddha retire then and recommend him to the monks so that he will be legitimately invested. But the Buddha refuses very sharply: such a perfidious discourse proves that Devadatta has understood nothing about the mission undertaken by the Master. Anyway, no one can succeed him, not even his two great disciples.

Realizing that he would get nowhere in this fashion, Devadatta decides to use more violent methods. Then legend takes over: the future Buddha and his young first cousin have already had troubles in their anterior lives, the latter always having the bad part. In this present life, he has murderous designs. With a hateful slyness, Devadatta would have first realized that good King Bimbisara was an obstacle to his wishes, since he supported the preeminence of Sakyamuni with all his power; he would thus have incited Crown Prince Ajatashatru to cause the death of his father. The fact is historical, but

Devadatta's participation in the crime is doubtful. After which, counting on the gratitude of Ajatashatru, who is now the king, he organizes three attempts against the life of the Buddha.

For the first one, he hires some professionals. Contrary to his hopes, the killers let themselves be totally subjugated by the Buddha—and convert. He wants to take good care, personally, of the sec-
79 ond attempt: knowing that the Master has a preference for his hermitage of the Vulture Peak near Rajagriha, he ambushes him as he is about to climb up and drops a rock on him. He probably miscalculated: the rock gets trapped between two peaks on its way down and only a chip hits one of the feet of the Blessed One, causing a minor scratch.

The third attempt, which might be wrongly credited to him, is the most famous in iconography. It is the episode of "the furious elephant," beautifully illustrated in a medallion of the balustrade of the Amaravati stupa (third century, Museum of the Government of Madras). This attempt also occurs at Rajagriha. An elephant called Nalagiri was reputed to have a bad temper; he is described as "mean and a killer of men." It is true that some of these animals do not let themselves be tamed easily. The elephant, which belongs to the royal stables, rushes at full gallop through the streets of the capital, with all signs of extreme irritation. Had Devadatta caused him to be drugged? It is also claimed that he had promised his guards a large reward if they let him loose in the city. Be that as it may, this demented charge, creating panic in its course, starts at the precise moment when the Buddha goes out with some disciples for his daily quest for food. Faced with the disorderly gallop of the enormous beast, the frantic pedestrians try to protect themselves as best as they can while the other town residents rush to their windows and balconies—and even to their roofs—to investigate the cause of such an unusual commotion in the city.

In the midst of the general agitation, the Buddha remains impassive. The raging elephant grabs one of the legs of his terrified and powerless keeper with his trunk and throws him brutally to the ground, killing him instantly. Suddenly, the animal perceives the radiation of "benevolence" *(maitri)* of the Master. He immediately recovers his calm, and full of repentance, kneels in front of Sakyamuni, who caresses his forehead with his right hand, without forgetting to bring the poor elephant keeper, innocent victim of this incident, back to life.

But the twisted soul of Devadatta incites him to more subtle approaches. In fact, being a member of the community, he had since long noticed that not all monks adhered completely to the attitude of the Buddha toward the application of the rule. The Buddha believed that interdicts and permissions had to be adapted to the capacities of each individual, which denoted an intelligent tolerance. Many monks considered, in their private reflections, that such a tolerance was only "laxness." And some of them even thought that the Buddha himself had a rather elastic observance of the rule when it came to himself—which, of course, was false. But it is known that in each group, there are always discontented people, sour characters, obtuse or critical ones, as well as those whom we call "integrists." Of course, such were not absent among the community of the Master. This was a boon for Devadatta. It was child's play to get them together, and just as easy to become their representative.

In brief, since he had not been able to convince Sakyamuni to give him the succession, and since he

had failed in his attempts against the life of the Master, he thought of replacing him by attracting a group of about five hundred monks into a schismatic movement, calculating of course that he would be the absolute ruler and that he could then triumph over the Buddha. Yet all his intrigues failed. He did give eloquent sermons to monks he had entrapped, presenting under a good light all the rigorous obligations to which they had to submit—and thereby criticizing the tolerances that the Buddha had brought to the rule (while omitting to say that the mitigations were applied only in precise and individual cases), but he encountered the unequivocal condemnation of the Master, who proved to him for each of his attempts that his approach was not sincere and that he was clearly bent on sowing dissension in the community—among the monks as well as among the lay people.

The texts record the memory of these disagreements and of the confusion among the faithful. They mention that the venerable Ananda was troubled and wished to be reassured. Having been invited by the presumptuous Devadatta to a ceremony he was going to perform in Rajagriha, he went there in order to observe carefully what was happening in the religious group gathered by Devadatta. When Ananda returned to the Buddha, he was able to confirm that "Devadatta wants to throw discord in the community." And Sakyamuni was alarmed.

He then asked his two great disciples, Shariputra and Maudgalyayana, to go to Mount Gaya (where Devadatta was preaching) in order to bring back to the order the errant five hundred monks. Devadatta thought that he had won, completely misunderstanding the reason for their coming: for him the presence of the two emissaries of the Buddha meant that they approved his venture and had come to join him. He had not taken into account the fidelity of the two great disciples toward the Master. He had also quickly forgotten all his misdeeds.

Believing himself close to his goal, Devadatta gave in to exhaustion: feeling an irresistible desire to sleep, he entrusted the two great disciples with the rest of the ceremony, folded his mantle in four on the ground, and lay down, soon oblivious to his surroundings.

Shariputra and Maudgalyayana decided to take advantage of this. The former gave a magnificent sermon to the monks about the effects of the preaching of the Law, and the latter, taking the floor after him, offered a sermon on the wonderful effects of supernatural power. Subjugated, convinced, the five hundred monks followed them to the Bamboo Garden, where the Buddha was in residence. As soon as they had left, Kokalika, who had been at their head in the schism and who had stayed behind with Devadatta, woke up the latter to inform him—perhaps a little too abruptly—of the defection of all his followers. The shock was so great and Devadatta's spite so strong, that "a stream of warm blood rushed out of his mouth," and he died on the spot.

As soon as the five hundred monks were back in his hermitage, the Master set about to remind them of the eight qualities of a missionary. Then he described the eight bad propensities that had been Devadatta's. Unfortunately for the latter, added the Buddha, here he is, sentenced to live for a kalpa in pain and misfortune. A kalpa ("form") is a long time! Indeed, it is the duration of a world from its creation to its vanishing into chaos. But, the Master said: "He who offends the good man, the one who commits no evil/ vice dwells in him, cruel man, closed to love ... Let the wise beggar

seek a friend and give his trust to him/ Whose doctrine will lead him to the end of his sufferings" *(Chullavagga).*

However, the Buddha is not through with misfortune and disappointment. He had already lost his very dear friend Bimbisara, king of Magadha, whose death had been provoked so basely by his own heir and son, Ajatashatru. The same fate awaited another friend and protector of Sakyamuni, Prasenajit, king of Kosala, whose throne was seized by his son Virudhaka, helped by the minister (or general) of the court. One day, when Prasenajit left in great pomp to visit the Buddha, that high dignitary stole the insignia of royal power laid on the threshold of the hermitage and brought them in haste to Virudhaka, who was crowned without delay. When Prasenajit wanted to return to his palace, he found that his reign was over and he ran away, in distress, to Rajagriha, where he wished to ask for asylum with Ajatashatru and obtain moral comfort from the Buddha and his community. Unfortunately, being totally exhausted, he died upon his arrival.

Virudhaka was quite ambitious and impetuous. As soon as he had seized the throne, he set about enlarging his kingdom, and chose the neighboring territory for annexation: it was that of the Sakyas. He already had an excuse: when his father, Prasenajit, was planning to marry he had looked for a bride in that clan, which moreover, seemed to have owed him allegiance. But the Sakyas, proud and somewhat disdainful, had given him a so-called princess who, in reality, was born out of wedlock. The ruse was not discovered right away, and Virudhaka had been the result of the marriage. He had acquired a fierce hatred of the Sakyas, and now he intended to wash that offense against his own lineage in blood. In spite of all, he hesitated for a while, out of respect for Sakyamuni. The latter returned to Kapilavastu (for the last time in his life) in order to exhort all his relatives either to convert to the Good Law or to strengthen their faith. Having done all that he deemed possible to achieve in order to improve their karma, the Buddha left them forever.

The armies of Kosala then invaded the Sakya territory where they met no resistance: the Sakya warriors, imbued with Buddhist ideas of "nonresistance to violence," refused to spill the blood of the aggressors and the entire population was slaughtered. Few survivors managed to escape. One of them was to found a small kingdom at a later date.

And what about Virudhaka? According to legend, Buddha had predicted that he would die a violent death by fire. In order to escape such a fate, it is said that the king had caused a pavilion to be built in the center of a lake and had settled there. But a jewel, hit by chance by a sun ray, acted as a magnifying glass, and the whole pavilion went up in flames. Virudhaka and his minister died in the fire and were reborn in hell.

As to Ajatashatru, he decides to receive from the Buddha a "definitive" pardon for his faults; this was prompted by the advice of the physician Jivaka, attached to the person of the Master. As befits him, he goes in great pomp; in the course of a long conversation with Sakyamuni, he accuses himself of his crime: "For love of sovereignty, I caused my father, a virtuous man, to die." The Buddha "accepts his wish," but this crime, even confessed with contrition, does not put the penitent king into a state of grace. As soon as he is back in his kingdom, he thinks of implementing his project of enlarg-

ing it at the expense of the Vrijis, a clan of which—the Licchavis—owns Vaishali, a rich and powerful capital that Ajatashatru covets and that the Buddha cherishes because it has been known to him for a long time.

In fact, Ajatashatru, no matter how penitent he was, only wished to obtain the approval of the Buddha as well as the assurance that his enterprise would succeed. Thus he sends to the Vulture Peak, the residence of the Blessed One in Rajagriha, one of his two prime ministers, a Brahmin called Varshakara. However, instead of replying directly to the questions asked by the minister, the Buddha addresses his beloved disciple Ananda—who is busy fanning him—and has the latter explain the reasons why the Vrijis could not be easily defeated: they could be beaten only when they started giving up the rules that keep them in perfect agreement, namely: concord, respect for women, upkeep and veneration of the sanctuaries. And without paying any attention to Ajatashatru's political plans, the Master exhorts his monks to follow the example of the Vrijis lest disagreement come into the community (as Devadatta tried to bring about).

One might think: Here is another sermon. Of course it is a sermon, but this particular one marks the last active phase of the Buddha's life among men. And one can add: Concord, what an admirable theme!

This is truly the ultimate active phase. Sakyamuni is now of advanced age: he is almost eighty years old. Up to that time, the texts have never alluded to any discomfort or sickness in his life. More than forty-five years have elapsed since he received the Awakening and started his sermons and pilgrimages. During this "career," he has established the Buddhist order, organized the community, and imposed a rule on it, as well as preached the Four Noble Truths. At every opportunity, he has taken care that each individual sincerely converted to his precepts improve his karma, thus getting closer to liberation from the inexorable chain of samsara.

Shortly before the mission of Minister Varshakara, the rainy season had come to an end. It was, every year, the time at which the mendicant and preaching monks scattered all over the country, taking advantage of the eight months of coolness and dry weather. On the day after the visit, the Buddha himself, escorted by his cousin and beloved disciple Ananda as well as a following of monks, leaves Rajagriha, capital of Magadha, going in the direction of the Ganges. Used to long marches, which are quite customary in India, they easily reach the Mango Tree Nursery, Venuyashtika (Pali: Ambalatthika), where the Buddha had already given two great sermons. Once again, he admonishes his monks and preaches the Four Noble Truths. Then he decides to go on and reaches Nalanda, the home of his great disciple Shariputra, who greets him with respect and a very devoted welcome. Na-
87 landa is as yet only a humble village, but later on will become the seat of a famous university. Sakyamuni gathers his monks once again and enjoins them to follow carefully the discipline of the community.

At last, the procession arrives on the right bank of the Ganges, slightly to the south of an important confluence of several rivers, and stops at Pataligrama—which will later be the capital of the Maurya
83 emperors, Pataliputra (presently Patna). At that time, the two prime ministers of Ajatashatru, espe-

cially Varshakara, were busy organizing the construction of a fort that was to serve as a base for the attack against the Licchavis who were living on the left bank of the Ganges. The crowd gathers around the Buddha and his retinue, receiving them warmly. Then they cross the river, either by ferry —as is likely—or, miraculously, through the air, according to some other versions.

101 After two stages and two sermons, they arrive at Vaishali, one of the favorite places of the Buddha. The rainy season is coming close, once again. Sakyamuni advises his monks to scatter in all the villages of the area and to spend their yearly retreat there. As to himself, he settles in the Bamboo Village, Venugramaka (Pali: Beluva). It seems that it was at that time that the two great disciples, Shariputra and Maudgalyayana, died. He still has the faithful Ananda, who stays with him.

During the retreat, Sakyamuni becomes ill for the first time in his life: he has a violent fit of dysentery, "with strong, lethal pains," but he accepts them without complaining, strengthened by his will not to die until he has spoken again to the monks and taken leave of the community. He thus gets over his sickness, starts to convalesce, gets up, goes out, and sits in the shade. Yet he has no illusions; when Ananda congratulates him on the recovery of his strength, he answers: "Here I am a weak old man; I am at the end of my road; my life is over, my years number almost eighty." He thinks that he has taught the Law without any restriction. What more can he do? "Therefore, O Ananda, be your own light, be your own recourse; have no other light outside the Law, no other recourse but the Law." And he denies ever having wanted to rule the community—which might not be perfectly true.

Having recovered his health, the Buddha goes back to his daily quest for food, and goes regularly to Vaishali, always escorted by Ananda. Returning from town, they usually rest in one or the other of the sanctuaries or inside a park. One day, they stop in the sacred wood of Chapala, to spend the rest of the day there. The Buddha sits down at the foot of a tree, his disciple next to him. He is visibly melancholic: "How beautiful is Vaishali, O Ananda, this land of the Vrijis, with its buildings, its parks, and its sanctuaries! How charming the sanctuaries of Udena and Gotama, and the sanctuary of the Seven Mango Trees and that of the Sons, and the sanctuaries of Saranda and Chapala. Diversified in its beauty is the continent of India (Jambudvipa), and life there is sweet for men." Then he continues, making a veiled request: if asked, he, the Predestined, can extend his life until the end of the present cosmic period (kalpa). But Ananda remains silent. The Buddha reiterates his proposal a second and third time—and the disciple still does not respond. Then the Buddha tells him to step aside, and he remains alone.

Not for long. Here comes Mara—for the last time. This god of Love and Death reminds the Buddha that, during the last week after the Awakening, in Bodhgaya, he had already suggested that the Buddha enter nirvana without delay. The Buddha had then refused, saying that he would do so only after having trained monks and established a community. The time has come, Mara tells him, since the conditions he had named have already been fulfilled. Sakyamuni agrees: "Do not be concerned, O Mara, you do not have much longer to wait; soon the *parinirvana* of the Predestined will start." And Mara vanishes.

It was thus that in the sacred wood of Chapala near Vaishali "in full consciousness and awareness,

the Blessed One gave up what life he had left in him." Such a serious decision can only be accompanied by grandiose phenomena: "And the earth shook," say the texts. This might be the time to recall (if the connection has not yet been made) that the Earth *(bhumi)* had already played an important part in the life of the Buddha when it guaranteed the failure of Mara after the Awakening. It manifests itself again as if—this time—it were approving the ultimate end of the Blessed One.

When Ananda returns to Sakyamuni and learns from him that he gave his word to Mara to enter *parinirvana* very soon, he protests: Why would the Master not extend his stay among the creatures until the end of this kalpa? Too late, he replies: I had suggested it to you three times and you remained silent. The opportunity was missed. Things have to run their course, and they will—in the next three months, because now it is unavoidable. It is in such a spirit that he addresses his monks: he has already told them long ago that fate condemns us to be parted from those we love, for all that lives must perish. But, he adds, "he who, without failing, remains faithful to the word of truth/ is freed from this sea of births (samsara) and reaches the end of suffering."

The season of the rains is now over. The Buddha will go back on the road, as he has done for so many years, surrounded by several monks and, of course, escorted by Ananda. The Blessed One will leave forever the city of Vaishali. The crowd, very moved, comes along knowing what the Buddha has decided and aware that this is a final departure. The Buddha himself, filled with emotion, leaves this place that was dear to him, contemplating it "with a last glance."

The small group then enters the territory of the Mallas and goes on toward Kushinagara (present Kasia). After six stages, they reach the little town of Papa (Pali: Pava), where the Mahavira, founder of Jainism, was to die a few years later. A blacksmith, Chunda, lived there with his family; like his fellows, he made a good living, which is why he immediately invited the Buddha and his retinue to a
117 meal at his table. Since he owns a mango orchard, the reception will take place there. Everybody is busy in the preparations, and no one entertains sinister suspicions about the good blacksmith, who is a faithful follower of the Buddhist doctrine. However, he has had the fatal idea of including in the menu a dish that must have been a specialty of his house, called "pork delight" *(sukaramaddava).* The scholars who translated the Sanskrit and Pali texts were not necessarily experts in culinary matters and they do not agree about the composition of that "delight." But one fact is certain: as soon as the Buddha, who was served first according to protocol, had swallowed a few morsels, he fell very ill and hastily requested that his companions not be served the dish. His illness brought about a bloody diarrhea, apparently a worsened relapse of the trouble he had already had in the Bamboo Village near Vaishali. Yet the Buddha remains entirely lucid and insists very emphatically that Chunda be spared any harm, and he also reassures him; making a comparison between the offering of rice made by Sujata before the Awakening and the offering of food made by the blacksmith, which comes before the End, he gives to both of them an identical (and beneficent) value in the determinism guiding his ultimate life.

With the same energy that had helped him get over his first bout of dysentery, the Buddha leaves. But he is clearly in a state of physical weakness. He intends to go all the way to Kushinagara (Kasia).

Halfway there, he is so exhausted that he asks Ananda to put his mantle, folded four times, at the foot of a tree so that he can sit down on it. Then he suffers from a terrible thirst. He asks Ananda to fetch water from the nearby river. But his disciple points out to him that a train of five hundred chariots drawn by humpbacked oxen has just forded it: the water is muddy and it will take a long time until it clears again. The Buddha repeats his wish twice, without Ananda making a move. At the third request, he makes up his mind and notices (with surprise) that the water is purer than it has ever been. Thus the Buddha can quench his thirst, drinking from his alms bowl filled to the rim.

As soon as he is comforted, a Malla lord appears on the scene—perhaps the owner of the train of chariots that had just forded the river. He comes from Kushinagara and is on his way to Papa. He stops to greet the two religious, of course, and they start to converse. As often happens when one travels, this is an interesting encounter (but is this one fortuitous?). The rich Malla is called Putkasa and he says that he has been the pupil of the master Arada Kalapa, the very one with whom Sakyamuni stayed near Vaishali in order to learn from him—before the Awakening—the doctrine of yoga. The Buddha has no trouble showing to the Malla that he has more knowledge and more power than Arada Kalapa. Quite convinced, the Malla utters the profession of faith of the lay followers and gives the Master two pieces of material "gold colored, lustrous, and ready to be worn." The Blessed One accepts them and immediately gives one to Ananda. After which, the Malla prince resumes his travels.

As soon as he has left, Ananda makes the Buddha put on the two robes. And he immediately expresses his wonder: as soon as the sumptuous and shimmering cloth is wrapped around the body of the Master, it becomes drab and colorless. The reason is that at the same moment, the entire skin of the Buddha has started to sparkle with an incomparable brightness. Is it necessary to recall that a similar phenomenon is said to have taken place at the very moment when Sakyamuni was concluding his deep meditation at the end of the third watch and thus entered the stage of the Awakening? If the phenomenon appears for a second time, it is probably because it announces the forthcoming *parinirvana.*

Then the Buddha resumes walking. But he shows more and more signs of fatigue. He stops, rests, starts anew—the texts vary a little about the number of his stops. Arriving at the bank of the river
118 Hiranyavati (Kakutsha), he has another fit of weakness, and dives into the water, which revives him. This will be his last bath.

Making a supreme effort, he crosses the river and reaches the suburbs of Kushinagara, where many of the Mallas welcome him. However, he really feels exhausted. In the company of Ananda, he laboriously reaches Upvartana, where there is a wood of sal trees *(Shorea robusta)* called the Walk of the Mallas. He tells Ananda: "Prepare a bed for me, with the head to the North, between two sals: I am tired and would like to lie down." It is interesting to note that as early as the Vedic era, technical treatises advised to arrange the bedroom in the house in such a way that the bed would be set "with the head to the North." Interesting also to add that it was a sal branch that Queen Maya held at the moment of Siddhartha's birth in the gardens of Lumbini.

122 As soon as the bed has been prepared, the Buddha lies down on his right side, one leg on top of the

123 other, turning his face to the people who will come to him. For he will not immediately leave this world: there are still matters to settle. And he will put Ananda to work. But for the time being, his disciple is deeply afflicted. Standing a little aside from his Master, he starts weeping: the death of the Buddha, which is only too easy to foresee, will deprive him of this infallible support that has been leading him along the path of progress for so long. What will he do without him? Sakyamuni does not let him pine in self-pity and calls him to his bedside. With affection, he assures him that he has been most useful and that he will reach sanctity because he has acquired many merits. For the time being, he orders him to go to the notables of the Mallas to advise them of his coming death. And all the families of the area, each headed by its chief, start toward the deathbed. The procession lasts throughout the first watch.

But here comes a religious, Subhadra, who is troubled by heterodox teaching and strongly wishes to converse with the Blessed One. Though Ananda has tried to get rid of him, lest he tire the dying man, the Buddha asks him to confide in him about his worries. He rapidly converts him—and that was the last admission into the community during his lifetime. It was even more, since the man reached sanctity and became an *arhat.*

Lastly, the Blessed One addresses the monks gathered around him. He tells them: "The Law that I have taught you and the discipline that I have established for you will be your Master after my death." He invites them to question him for a last time. But none of them asks any questions, which causes Ananda to wonder: "In truth, I believe that among the whole assembly there is not a single brother having doubt or uncertainty about the Buddha, the Law, the Community, the Method, or the Path." And Sakyamuni to add: there is not a single one because even the least advanced knows that "he is not condemned to a new birth in pain and is assured of one day achieving the Illumination" (of the *arhat*).

Addressing himself to the monks, he further says: "Brothers, recall these words very well: All that is composed is perishable. Work carefully toward your salvation."

These were his last words.

Then without changing his position, the Buddha enters into contemplation. He goes through all its stages, and as the texts put it: "his spirit delved into the depths of mystical absorption, and when he reached that degree where all thought, all emotion disappear, where the consciousness of individuality ceases, he entered into the supreme nirvana, like a flame that goes out for lack of fuel." It happened at the end of the last watch—thus before dawn—on the first day of the full moon of the month of *vesakha* (May). At least, this is the Pali tradition, since many other dates are offered in various texts.

Needless to say, many prodigies occurred immediately: the earth shakes, the sal trees blossom, even though it is not the right season, the sky rains down perfumed petals and sandalwood powder, while a divine music plays. Near the bed of the Buddha there are some who are sad and lament, while
122 others are quietly recollected. The entire scene is well depicted in the colossal high relief of cave XXVI in Ajanta: gods are flying over the prone body of the Buddha, monks and lay notables are

seated in prayer by the bed, while Ananda, alone, close to the feet of the Blessed One, makes the traditional gesture of despair, right hand against the face.

The problem of the funeral has to be handled. According to some narrations, the Buddha himself had indicated to Ananda that it would be fitting to observe the protocol applied to a Kshatriya after his death. There is not much doubt that such a conception came rather late. In any event, it confirms the fact that the more Buddhism evolved throughout the following centuries the closer became the symbolic link between the Buddha and the universal sovereign *(chakravartin).* If one accepts the most frequent sources, these funeral rites were solemn and magnificent; and the participation of the gods was assured, as befitted the occasion. First, Ananda went to announce the death of the Master to the Mallas of Kushinagara. The latter took every measure solemnly to honor the remains of that exceptional being: perfumes, flowers, and garlands, musical instruments, dances and songs, everything was mustered to show how much the Mallas and their families—in spite of their great pain—wanted to show their respect and their veneration.

Then came the burial, the details of which vary from one version to the other. The body of the Buddha is said to have been wrapped in several shrouds—from ten to five hundred, according to the different texts—then laid in that cocoon inside an iron coffin containing oil and covered by a lid. A high and wide pyre was erected with scented woods, the coffin was raised up with some difficulty; the Mallas were going to incinerate it when they were advised that the ascetic Mahakashyapa was on his way to worship "the feet of the Buddha," in other words, to pay his last respects. Thus they waited for his arrival. Seven days had passed since the Buddha was with them. Everything was finally taken care of: the pyre was finally lit and it burned so well that the Mallas not only had to pour on it innumerable jugs of perfumed water, but the gods had to cause celestial rains.

When only the bones of the body were left, probably charred and for the most part reduced to ashes, the Mallas carefully collected them and carried them to the common house (a kind of municipal hall) of Kushinagara. There they posted armed guards while the remains were honored with much music, dance, and song. If they thought that they were going to keep them, it had been quite a mistake. The news had quickly spread to the neighboring kingdoms: everybody knew now that the Buddha had attained nirvana and that his body had been cremated near the capital of the Mallas.

Ajatashatru was the first one to react, sending a messenger: "I am of royal blood, as the Blessed One himself was. I am therefore worthy to have part of the relics of the body of the Buddha. I shall erect a tumulus for them and establish a festival [in their honor]." Almost simultaneously, six other sovereigns or clan chieftains made the same move: those of the Licchavis of Vaishali, the Sakyas of Kapilavastu, the Bulakas of Chalakalpa, the Kraudyas of Ramagrama, the Mallas of Papa—and Brahmins from Vishnudvipa.

The notables of Kushinagara met to deliberate. After all, they thought, the Buddha had chosen our territory in which to achieve his *parinirvana;* it is here that the last funeral respects were paid; it is therefore right that we should piously keep the remains. And they met all petitions, royal or otherwise, with a flat refusal. It was the beginning of what has been called "the War of the Relics."

Indeed, realizing that their requests, which they considered legitimate and had presented courteously, had been rejected, the seven kings and clan chieftains each marched at the head of their respective armies and, converging on Kushinagara, lay siege to the capital of the Mallas. Things were about to take a bad turn, for the attackers were quite determined. Seeing this, the Brahmin Drona, wisest of the wise, offers his good offices for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Since there are eight claimants to the relics, it will suffice to divide them into eight equal parts, one for each of them, Drona himself suggesting that he would be content with the urn that had held them, thus raising the total to nine. But the Mauryas of Pipphalvina, who arrived late, protest: they too are entitled to a share, since they also came. The adroit Drona entrusts them with the charcoals of the funeral pyre; thus there are ten well-defined shares: the argument is over.

127 And the kings, the clan chieftains, and the Brahmins each return to their territories, riding on their parade elephants, carefully carrying a box containing their sacred share, accompanied by their standards. As soon as possible, they will do everything to keep their promise to honor the Buddha. They will each erect in their very own capital, a monumental reliquary shaped as a tumulus in which the precious chest they brought back will be buried. This tumulus—which in Brahmanic society seemed to have had a funeral character—became in the Buddhist environment the stupa (Pali: *thupa*). With its hemispheric shape, built in solid masonry, it became the typical monument of Buddhism (even though the followers of Jainism also adopted it), since its usage spread to the relics of saintly personages, and it also took on, in many cases, a solely commemorative meaning.

One of the eight stupas meant for the relics of the body of the Buddha, that of Ramagrama, was 124 (according to the legend) entrusted by the Kraudyas to the people of the snakes *(naga)*, who watched jealously over it and refused, two centuries later, to abandon it when Emperor Ashoka started to recover all the relics of the Blessed One to scatter them in his empire inside countless stupas.

118–121 In fact, no artistic trace from the time of the Buddha remains, if any ever existed. In Kushinagara itself, a holy place if there ever was one, three exhaustive archeological digs have only brought up some remnants of monuments of which the most ancient might go back to the Mauryas (third century B. C.), though most likely to the Kushanas (around the Christian era and after). When the Chinese pilgrim Hiuan-tsang visited that site in 637, he was shown various stupas said to have been erected on the principal places of the great events that had occurred there: the house of the blacksmith Chunda, where the Blessed One took his last meal, the site of the sal trees where he entered into nirvana, that of his funeral pyre, and many others, the sight of which was enough to sustain a pious emotion among the travelers who, like him, walked "in the footsteps of the Buddha" (René Grousset).

In the absence of tangible memorials, such as ruins that are contemporary with these events, we still have canonical texts, the dates of which are very much in dispute, but which have the merit of probably having preserved certain data from the time of the Buddha's death at Kushinagara. He left a community lacking a strict rule, without a single and fixed seat, without writings. Thus, immediately after the *parinirvana*, there was a strong need to organize the Buddhist movement. The initiative

started with Mahakashyapa, who went so far as to exclude Ananda from the enterprise. A year later, he gathered in Rajagriha the first Buddhist council, where Ananda was nevertheless admitted; he was questioned about the sermons that the Buddha had given. But as early as that memorable meeting, numerous variations appeared, either in the principles practiced by the various groups of monks, or in their very concepts. Ananda, in agreement with Mahakashyapa, put himself at the head of the community and kept it, until his death, as close as possible to the teaching of the Buddha. Since he had always seen the latter go about the country and preach, he did likewise, training in his turn many disciples, and thus extending as long as possible the message of the Blessed One, endeavoring to propagate it abroad.

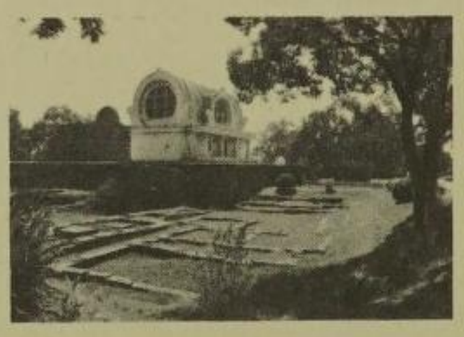
A second council was deemed necessary. It took place about a hundred years later in Vaishali (ca. 367 B. C.). This did not prevent Buddhist sects from appearing and multiplying. Many other councils took place during the following centuries.

From now on, Buddhism was to diversify more and more. But it also spread, in its various forms, throughout the regions of India and the neighboring countries until, little by little, it reached most of Asia.

BUDDHA'S DEATH AND ENTRANCE INTO PARINIRVANA – COMMEMORATIVE MONUMENTS AND RELIQUARIES

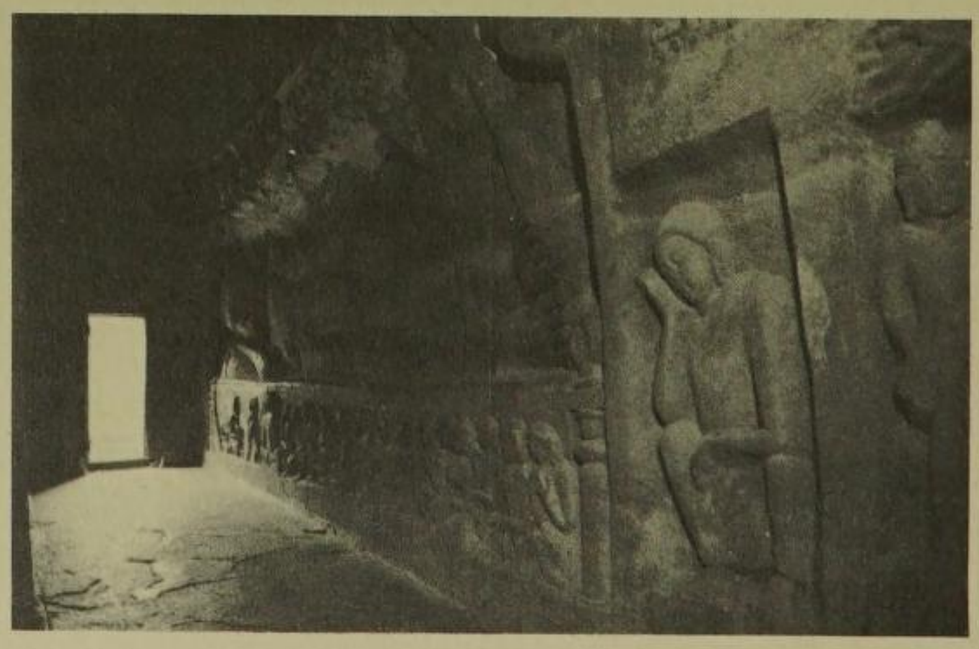
116 The lower part of a scene in which the Buddha accepts the throne in the middle, where the imprints of his feet are visible on the stool. The iconography is early Buddhist, for the Buddha himself is not portrayed. Before him are four respectful young women, who have either prostrated themselves or are making the prayer gesture *(anjali)*. – Relief fragment from Amaravati, marble, approximately middle of 2nd century. – Madras, State Museum.

117 Kushinagara region: site of the little town of Papa, where the Buddha received his last meal from the blacksmith Chunda.



118–121 Kushinagara, the spot where the Buddha entered *parinirvana*. Many monuments were erected here over the centuries. A stupa dating back to the Gupta era (first half of the 5th century), a vast statue of the recumbent Buddha, which is probably ascribable to a donor of the same period, and a vihara, often restored and newly erected in 1956 for the celebrations to commemorate the Buddha Jayanti. There are many other indications that the site was built on from the 1st to about the 11th century.

122 This large relief chiseled in the rock on the left-hand wall meets one's eyes on entering. It shows the *parinirvana* of the Buddha Sakyamuni. The blissful Buddha is stretched out on a bed between the trunks of two sal trees. He lies on his right side, with one leg over the other, supporting his head in his right hand, supported in its turn by a cushion. The long bas-relief, which unfolds in front of the bed, shows monks and a few laymen (donors?) who appear to be watching over the Buddha. At his feet – in the foreground – the faithful Ananda sits alone, weeping. – Ajanta, grotto XXVI, c. beginning of the 6th century.



123 Flyleaf of a manuscript written on fan palm leaves, representing the Buddha's *parinirvana,* painted in the Pala period (12th century?). – New Delhi, Indian National Museum.

124 The Ramagrama stupa is one of the eight reliquaries in which the Buddha's ashes were stored. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuan-tsang visited it and related the legend that King Ashoka, who had all the shrines opened in order to distribute the relics throughout the country, had left unopened only this stupa, which was guarded by serpents *(naga).* – Amaravati. Decorative panel of a stupa, 3rd century, marble. Madras, State Museum.

125 Prince Siddhartha (still adorned, but with his head already shaved) is venerated by hovering divinities. Above, the gods pay homage to the prince-bodhisattva's turban which, like the alms bowl, they have brought to their heavenly abode and enthroned there. The turban was a long cloth wound round a framework which allowed it to be put on and taken off like a hat. – Detail of a Mathura tympanon in the style of the Kusha period, 2nd century.

126 Head of a monumental Buddha. Both western characteristics (wavy hair, straight nose, clearly delineated mouth, emphatic chin) and Asiatic features (slightly protruding eyes, arched eyebrows, round face, elongated ears) are clearly stressed. – Gandhara (Pakistan), Karkal site, Graeco-Buddhist style, c. 3rd century, slate, h: 0.42 m, Paris, Musée Guimet (no. A02903).

127 The complete relief would have portrayed seven elephants in sequence, each of which carried a king and his elephant guide. This is the initial scene of the distribution of the Buddha's relics (after his incineration in Kushinagara) to the kings who had laid claim to them. – Fragment from the banisters of a stupa balustrade. Shunga period style, 2nd century B. C., sandstone, h: 0.29 m, New Delhi, Indian National Museum.

128 The stupa whose cupola and summit can be seen in the background is said to date from the Ashoka era (3rd century B.C.). It has been restored in the past, surrounded by an undecorated balustrade, and given four magnificent portals *(torana);* this is certainly the most recent. Each of the gates, which face in the four celestial directions, is richly ornamented with historical scenes. – Santshi, stupa I, west gate, 1st century A.D.

129 The bodhisattva Maitreya, Buddha of the future time, who sits to the left of Sakyamuni in the heaven of the thirty-three divinities, where he awaits the halpa that will follow the present one, in order to fulfill his messianic role (see Fig. 42). More than any other, he embodies the turning point which transformed Buddhism as conceived by Sakyamuni into a faith and a mystical cult that was to persist into our own era – in religious movements, however, which doubtfully accord with the Buddha's own preaching.

▲118 ▼119

▲127

EVOLUTION AND EXPANSION OF BUDDHISM

If the Buddha had been able to foresee the transformations that his doctrine was to undergo after his *parinirvana,* he would probably have been surprised. He preached a morality, a way of life, an ethics, but at no time a religion: no god rules over the thought of his followers, he did not propose a pantheon, his very person has not been deified. But his wish has been fulfilled: this doctrine spread widely throughout India and its ecumenical character became more pronounced.

Thanks to the political unification achieved at the end of the fourth century B.C. by the native dynasty of the Mauryas, the travels of the missionaries were made easier. Their most famous monarch, Emperor Ashoka (who was said to have converted to Buddhism about the year 260), seems to have encouraged this diffusion, especially to Ceylon, the present Sri Lanka, where it is said that his son Nahinda himself introduced the doctrine of the Buddha around the year 242. A third council meeting at Pataliputra at about this time and the establishment of important sanctuaries, stupas, and monasteries throughout the entire empire prove that the vitality of Buddhism is great over two hundred years after the death of the Master.

This success lasts and increases during the following centuries, in spite of some hostility on the part of the Shungas, followers of Brahmanism, who took over the realm of the Mauryas throughout a large portion of the territory. It was indeed at that time—starting approximately 150 years before Christ—that an exclusively Buddhist narrative sculpture on stone appeared, marking the beginning of a long and admirable artistic evolution. It is important to stress that until the first and second centuries of the Christian era, this sculpture evokes the personage of the Buddha only through symbols.

During the same lapse of time, Buddhism has evolved. Several sects have been established, some of which have even split: some over matters of discipline, others over articles of belief. It is thus a very lively doctrine, perhaps a bit fragile because of its divergencies, but a very active one. All these movements benefit from the support of the new political masters of one part of India, the Kushans, who have come from the borders of the steppes and eastern Iran and also rule over the territories of modern Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was during their era (ca. first century B.C. to fourth or fifth century
92 A.D.) that the image of the Buddha was conceived, perhaps simultaneously in the Hellenistic school
78 of Gandhara (Pakistan) and in the Indian school of Mathura. He is shown as a monk wearing a skirt
76 and a monastic mantle and bearing the signs of sanctity. This image has been reproduced to the point
81 of saturation in all other countries outside India under various aspects that nevertheless remain quite
105 faithful to the ancient representations.

Parallel to this, as if it were a filigree, there grows little by little a body of new theories that, under the name of Mahayana, will come out openly and develop as early as the first centuries of the Christian era, with its own scriptures (or texts), building step by step its particular iconography. The Mahayana or "Greater Vehicle" of salvation, is obviously the answer to an emotional and mystical need that the Buddha had not taken into account, for perfectly logical reasons. Built on a solely moral approach with a precise goal of liberation from the individual self, his theory could not bother with pseudo-divine interventions to which one could have recourse. One can even say that such a conception was totally opposed to his. However, there was in India a multitude of sects of various origins,

having philosophical or ascetical traditions, schools of reflection and exegesis, which quite naturally were going to look for more "intellectual" interpretations than the rule of life preached by Sakyamuni at the outset. One must also take into account the development, at about the same time, of the religions of *bhakti* ("trusting adoration"), which tended to correct in the Brahmanic cults the rigors of the ritual by enabling the faithful to follow a growing trend toward mysticism.

In fact, the appearance of Mahayana takes place in a religious environment that was quite the rule in India, just as the vocation of the Buddha was itself part, a few centuries earlier, of a large trend of religious reforms and philosophical thoughts in eastern Asia.

While offering, as its name indicates, other ways to reach salvation, Mahayana is nothing but an evolution of the original Buddhism, the latter being called Theravada (Thera [Pali] = "Elders") or—in a disparaging sense—Hinayana, "Lesser Vehicle." In fact, the one and the other have coexisted for a long time without any antagonism: Mahayana keeps the rule established by the Buddha, but adds to it a whole apparatus of philosophical speculations. And little by little the monks become more sedentary than itinerant so as to devote themselves more frequently to these spiritual exercises and a corresponding teaching; which is why time will bring a multiplication of monasteries and universities such
87 as that of Nalanda.

This evolution will express itself in the building up of a pantheon of sorts, rather limited at the start, but getting bigger later on, mostly composed of a lineage of six "mortal" Buddhas, imaginary beings who were supposed to have lived "in the past" and to have attained Awakening, all of this in a way very similar to the Buddha of "the present time," that is, Sakyamuni.

These Buddhas are accompanied by bodhisattvas, "Beings promised Awakening," mythological entities who, after having reached their ultimate rebirth, refused to attain *parinirvana* so as to be born once more with the specific purpose of saving as many men as possible by helping them for a longer time on the way of salvation. Iconography distinguishes them clearly from the Buddhas: the
28 latter wear monastic dress like Sakyamuni, show the same distinctive signs and the same sacred
29 marks, while the bodhisattvas are depicted as princely characters, dressed in a skirt of varying length,
31 wearing many sumptuous ornaments, their chest bare and diagonally crossed with the ribbon of initiation of the kings and the Kshatriya caste.

42 Already mentioned in the Theravada texts is Maitreya, Buddha of the "future times," who—while
129 presently only a bodhisattva, in residence in the heaven of the Thirty-three Gods—is awaiting the moment of an ultimate rebirth. It is he who, like a messiah, will be asked to go back down to the earth of men in order to save them during the cosmic period (kalpa) to come. When he appears in the Mahayana iconography, his attributes are the water jug of the ascetics in his left hand and a miniature stupa adorning the front part of his hair. Since his role is messianic, he can be seen as part of the great surge of hope in the coming of a savior that was felt shortly before the Christian era: in the Iranian regions with the cult of Mithra (later on adopted by Rome), in Palestine with Jesus of Nazareth, in the various areas of India—in the North as well as in the South—indeed with Maitreya. His name might even reflect a complex origin that would be Irano-Vedic and Buddhist (Mithra/Mitra/Mait-

reya), a suggestion that has been studied and disputed at length. But it is possible that his name attracted an amalgam of concepts that are more or less connected. Such an occurrence is not rare, either in Mahayana or in Brahmanism.

75 Other bodhisattvas also appeared rather early in Mahayana: for instance Avalokiteshvara "The Lord (Ishavara) who looks from above." He holds a pink lotus (*padma*) in blossom—the symbol of spiritual birth is recognizable—and bears in his hair the picture of a mythical "primordial" buddha (*Jina*). He will quickly become very popular, for he is reputed for his efficacious intervention in cases of extreme distress: wrecks, fires, danger of violent death.

Vajrapani, "Carrier of Lightning" (*vajra*), is also part of the close retinue of the Buddha, to whose service he is attached, as was Ananda. His origin is confused with that of Indra, the king of the gods, whose attribute is the lightning, offensive and defensive weapon and also the hardest of all diamonds. This bodhisattva is thus the link between Vedic mythology, Theravada Buddhism, and Mahayana. He will retain a privileged position in the iconography of later Buddhism, that of the Tantra, which will be described further on.

Rather slowly, the two forms of Buddhism—coexisting in certain areas—tend to get further and further apart. The progressive divergence is much more noticeable in the philosophical schools than in iconography. For instance, a site as rich as Ajanta shows clearly that Mahayanic elements were not very numerous as yet between the fifth and the seventh centuries, while there was a strong majority of themes illustrating the episodes of the last life of the Buddha and those of his anterior lives (*jataka*). The same phenomenon is noticed outside of India, as in the famous Borobudur of central Java (ca. 800-850). In fact, while turning to a different conception of the techniques leading to salvation, Mahayana does not abandon ancient traditions, though Theravada indignantly rejects the way followed by the new Buddhist movement.

Many factors incited its followers to have more and more recourse to devotional practices, ritualism, the use of symbolic and even magical formulas. Indeed, they lived in a Brahmanic environment where, under the combined pressure of old popular beliefs and a scholarly and multiform philosophical research, there grew what J. Varenne quite aptly described as a "Tantric mentality" (1968). The terms *Tantric* and *Tantrism* were coined in the West on the basis of a body of texts, the Tantras, most of which were written in Sanskrit starting about the year 350 and reaching their peak during the tenth century. Given their extreme complexity, it is not easy to present a synthesis; but one can outline the main directions that will, indisputably, influence Mahayana and usher it into a third stage of the evolution of Buddhism. What is outstanding is the concept of the identity of the macrocosm and the microcosm—the universe and man—the proliferation of female deities described as the mysterious energy, the "power" (*Shakti*) of the gods as well as of men, the importance granted to rituals of initiation (with devout invocations reduced to a single word, "instrument of thought," or *mantra*), the practice of an "esoteric" yoga making more use of the adoration of a sacred image than of meditation —all of which are intended to aid the adept in achieving perfect union with the divine, the total freedom of the highest stage in the quest for the Absolute.

Starting in the ninth century, Mahayana adopts the practices of yoga and of the cult, especially in Bengal. A cosmology is devised, expressed, as it were, graphically, but also architecturally (especially in Borobudur, Java), and at the same time there appears a structured hierarchy of personages from superior (Jina) and "human" Buddhas (including Sakyamuni), down to mere genies, via the bodhisattvas— powerful mediators—and their female equivalents, the shaktis, who represent (when they are seen from the metaphysical point of view) access to Knowledge; their union with the masculine character corresponding to each one of them results in the Thought of Awakening. Among the practices used in initiation, the most important is perhaps that of the meditation centered on a complex geometrical design called *mandala* ("circle,""drawn structure"), serving as support for the thought that must mentally go along a road leading from multiplicity to unity or from the outside to the center, seat of the metaphysical vacuum with which the adept identifies himself.

This is the most elaborate form of Tantric Buddhism such as it was known in Tibet, coming originally from Bengal, and still practiced today on the foothills of the Himalayas (Nepal, Sikkim, Ladakh, Bhutan, Mustang, etc.) as well as in the centers for Tibetan refugees who have settled in India and the West since 1959. One can notice some harbingers as early as the fifth or sixth centuries in the mural paintings of Bamiyan (present Afghanistan).

But it is certain that this evolution, so extreme that it was in danger of falling into the very excesses against which the Buddha had reacted, made the existence of Buddhism in India itself more and more precarious: it could no longer reach the masses, only the initiates—and here one fell again into the "elitism" practiced in the Brahmanic environment. To which persecutions were added, at times violent ones, by the Brahmins themselves, especially in the South (eighth to ninth centuries), and those implemented by the Muslim invaders who conquered the Sindhi as early as the beginning of the eighth century. Under this twofold impact, Buddhism was quite shaken; it declined only slowly. It retained its hold longer in certain areas (fourteenth to fifteenth centuries), without, however, regaining the vitality that had marked it for so long. If some of the Buddhist sites of India are still attracting pilgrims nowadays, the latter are foreign monks; there are no active foundations anymore except in
62 Bodhgaya, where there are Tibetan and Chinese monasteries. And one should also take into account the efforts of the modern Mahabodhi Society, which has been attempting since 1891—and especially since 1949—to restore the Theravada Buddhist faith in several great Indian centers.

The growing complexity of teaching in the sects of Mahayana and the practices that led them toward a Hinduistic syncretism, the parallel ascendency of Brahmanism and its dynamic development —all this contributed to the weakening of Buddhism in India itself, even though it had started there. Moreover, it directly received two successive shocks: the first, during the sixth century, was the brief but devastating incursion of the Huns in the Indo-Gangetic plain, where they destroyed the teaching centers and monasteries. After that hurricane, which had no political consequences, the monks took refuge in Bihar and Bengal, where, thanks to the protection of the Pala Buddhist kings (eighth to the end of the twelfth century), Mahayana survived and then reached Nepal, Tibet, and all of the foothills of the Himalayas.

The second shock was far longer in duration and irreparable in its consequences: starting from the twelfth century the conquering armies of Islam arrived; it took more than a century for them to erect fortresses and to destroy sanctuaries and monasteries, but they dealt a fatal blow to Indian Buddhism. At the very beginning of the thirteenth century, the Sena dynasty, which had succeeded that of the Palas, was annihilated.

One must note that in the South, where Theravada Buddhism had flourished (especially in Ceylon [Sri Lanka]), a similar decline took place at the same time, due then to the victory of a more and more triumphant Hinduism.

However, if it had progressively disappeared from India, its country of origin, Buddhism had followed—under its two forms—an astonishing trajectory throughout middle, eastern, southeastern, and far eastern Asia. It is worthy of notice that after several centuries of expansion toward the West, especially in Bactria (present Afghanistan and Pakistan), the Buddhist faith came against a more and more impregnable wall: that of the Sassanids of Iran, who had economic reasons (the trade in silk and materials), and political, religious, and cultural ones, to defend their autonomy. Thus Sassanid Iran erected an impassable barrier between Buddhism and Christianity in the middle of their march toward one another in the heart of Eurasia. The farthest point reached from India to the West by Buddhism has been traced to Tadzhikistan—where a great buddha in *parinirvana* was unearthed by Soviet archeologists in Adzhina-tepe (middle of the eighth century). To the North, Buddhism spread to Tibet and Mongolia; to the East, to China, Korea, Japan; to the South, to Indochina and Indonesia. One might as well say that it covered all of Asia; with varying success, of course, and with dogmatic deviations due to the various religious environments over which it was superimposed or that it tried to attract to its own concepts.

Since it could not go farther in the direction of Europe, it spread generally to the East along two great geographical directions, often branching out, some to the North and others to the South. The northern ones, on the continent, starting from the Afghan areas, followed the caravan trails crisscrossing Sinkiang, its deserts and oases. Thus they rejoined the paths followed in China proper, crossing it to reach Korea (about 372); the latter transmitted Buddhism to Japan (about 562).

The southern trajectories took Buddhism as early as the third century B.C. to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), then they followed various maritime circuits leading to several points of the Indochinese peninsula, Indonesia (present Malaysia, Sumatra, Java, southern Borneo), and southern China.

These paths, whether caravan trails or maritime roads, had been opened for a long time by trade and they never ceased to increase throughout the centuries. They were largely used by Buddhist missionaries of all origins: some going from India to the East to spread the doctrine, others coming to India to receive direct teaching there, to make a pilgrimage, and to gather holy images. Thus was started during the first thousand years of the Christian era a vast movement of pious travelers who were risking their lives in order to propagate the Law (dharma) of the Buddha and its evolution.

For those travels were risk-laden. When the missionaries joined caravans, they had to accept their slow pace, suffer from the weather, put up with intense dust, dog days, and desert thirst as well as

terrible cold while crossing high mountain passes—all the while facing the risk of being ambushed, stripped of their possessions, and even murdered by merciless brigands. If they were compelled to travel by sea, they had to face storms, the discomfort of life on board ship, the problems of the doldrums, the weeks of long wait—shaken by the waves—before reaching port; if, that is, by good fortune, their convoy had not been captured on the way by pirates or taken over by mutinous crews. Some of the accounts and memoirs of Chinese missionaries confirm the *jataka* stories and also give much priceless information about their itineraries, the holy places they visited, geographical descriptions of the areas, the monasteries, universities, or hermitages where they stayed. Their precision is often so good that archeologists have been able to use their information to locate certain sites or ruins.

Who were these fearless travelers who left their countries at times for twelve, fifteen, or twenty-five years? What were their goals? In fact, many of them were monks: Indians born for instance in Sinkiang or Afghanistan—such as, respectively, Kumarajiva (344-413) and Buddhabhadra (359-429) —or coming from Cambodia: Paramartha (traveling from 550 to 569), who was born in central India. There were also famous masters or reformers invited to correct errors in dogma or rule: for instance the Indians Padmasambhava—in the middle of the eighth century—and Atisha—in the eleventh century—who implemented reforms in the Tibetan clergy, or a doctor of Nalanda University, Dharmapala, who played a prominent part in Indonesia.

Whatever their monastic or pedagogical qualities, it is obvious that they had a tremendous influence on the progress of Buddhism throughout eastern Asia. Their first concern was to spread the written Buddhist teaching; thus in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Indian Buddhaghosha undertook in the fifth century to have the Sanskrit texts translated into Pali. But the most efficient pilgrims were mostly the Chinese: between the second and the eleventh centuries, 1,692 texts were translated into Chinese; among these translations, many have preserved the versions that—in the Sanskrit language —have since disappeared. All by himself, the monk Hiuan-tsang, traveling from 629 to 647, brought back 657 Buddhist works—without counting memoirs that were written after his return to China by one of his disciples.

It is certain that the use of xylography printed on paper (eighth century in Japan, ninth in China), then the invention of movable type—first in baked clay (middle of the eleventh century in China), then in wood, and finally bronze (Korea, first half of the thirteenth century)—greatly facilitated the diffusion of Buddhist texts—because this was already printing, a century before it appeared in the West.

In parallel with all these endeavors to glean as much as possible of sacred documentation, there was a more and more intense demand in the field of teaching through images. Imitating the cave monasteries and sanctuaries of India, ancient Afghanistan, and Sinkiang, Buddhist China built many foundations into cliffs, starting in the year 460 in Yunkang, under the dynasty—of Turkish descent —of the northern Weis, in Longmen (end of the fifth century), and Loyang. Then Buddhist art was propagated to Korea, and the latter handed it over to Japan. Wooden and bronze statues, and votive

offerings made out of clay, had been brought back together with the books. Sculptors and painters clearly found an inspiration in them, though there already was a dominant Chinese style.

Wherever Buddhism took root, one could notice a similar phenomenon: on the one hand, Theravada attempted to preserve its original "purity" but let itself be contaminated by the heterodox theories of Mahayana; on the other hand, the religions existing before its arrival attempted either to assimilate it or to reject it, either by persecuting it or by absorbing it. For instance, under the Chinese Tang dynasty (618-907), in the year 845, a very strong repression on the part of Confucianism and Taoism caused Buddhism—until then dominant—to lose not only its strength but even its artistic creativity.

It is not possible in this book to retrace the good and bad times of Buddhism in Asia. However, it is necessary to point out certain facts. First of all, the fact that it was predominant for centuries—and even more than twenty-five hundred years in some areas—that it produced new moral and philosophical concepts, gave rise to countless vocations, and created often admirable artistic styles wherever it reached, not only in India, but also in Cambodia and Indonesia. In many instances, and in many kingdoms, it has been adopted—under one or the other of its forms—as the state religion: in China, Tibet, Japan, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, etc.; and this, at times since the eleventh century, confirmed later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, after successive political changes.

To draw a general present picture in the context of the end of the twentieth century is not an easy task. Political upheavals during this period of time have changed all or part of what was (or has been) Buddhism. We have witnessed its destruction in whole geographical zones; for instance, since the fifteenth century, Islam supplanted it in Indonesia (where a diffuse syncretism is weakly persisting), just as it did in Sinkiang, Bangladesh, and even southwestern China. In Tibet, which was once again annexed to China in 1959, the Buddhist theocracy has been driven away: the Dalai Lama took refuge in India, the Panchen Lama in China, and we hear little about the Buddhist faith that may have survived there since that date. In the same way, the Cambodian genocide of 1975 dealt a direct blow to the monastic order and its bibliographical treasures: it is said that ten thousand volumes were publicly burned, pagodas were consumed in flames, and the clergy destroyed. Elsewhere, for instance in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), there has been a politization of Buddhism: President Bandaranaike, though declared a bodhisattva, was assassinated. Also, in Mongolia, the lamas—who perform the rituals—are in fact "sworn to" the Communist government of the republic. In Japan, Buddhism has been warped by multiple changes in its contact with Japanese religions and it has been the national religion connected with democracy and pacifism. If it remains a state religion, it is more in the formal sense than as a deeply lived faith (except perhaps in the countryside).

In Europe and in the United States, Buddhist societies—of which the Mahabodhi in London is one of the most powerful—and associations (Friends of the Buddha, for instance), have tried to spread Buddhism, but their action does not go farther than limited circles. Due to the influx of Tibetan, Cambodian, and Vietnamese refugees, pagodas have been adapted or built in the main countries of settlement and immigrant monks perform the traditional services.

A long time ago, the disappearance of the Good Law was predicted—with various dates, we must stress: 500, 1,000, and even 12,000 years after the Awakening.
For it is part of the realm of contingency, and as such is subject to the universal principle of decay.

All accumulations lead to ruin;
All rises to fall;
All unions to separation;
And life leads to death.

(*Divyavadana*)

EPILOGUE

Encounters Between Buddhism and Christianity

"There is only one person whom we might be persuaded to rank close to Jesus, and that is the Buddha, a man of great mystery, possessed of an astounding, almost superhuman freedom, and at the same time a goodness so impressive that we would attribute it to some universal force. Perhaps the Buddha is the ultimate figure with whom Christianity will have to come to terms. No one as yet has been able precisely to gauge his significance for Christians and for Christianity. Possibly Christ had not merely one forerunner (one, that is, from the Old Testament, John, the last of the prophets), but another from the heart of the civilization of the ancient world, Socrates; and yet another, one who uttered the last word of oriental religious knowledge and self-mastery, the Buddha."

Romano Guardini

Buddhist-Christian dialogue has grown in extent and interest since World War II. Concern for peace and common humanity in one world faced the great religions with a challenge and a demand for responsible cooperation which they could not ignore. In its *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,* the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church pointed the way ahead. It was hardly accidental that this document's opening words – *Nostrae aetatis* ...—should have acknowledged its commitment to the present age:

> *In our times, when every day men are being drawn closer together and the ties between various peoples are being multiplied, the Church is giving deeper study to its relationship with non-Christian religions.*

This conciliar declaration did not remain a mere statement of intent. Very soon after the end of the Council, the new spirit gave rise to courageous initiatives on all sides; some of these were added to, and others were associated with, the activities of international bodies. The world religions took part in innumerable congresses, conferences and symposia devoted to joint work on social, cultural and scientific aspects of responsibility for the one world. These efforts yielded the fruits of all genuine ecumenism: a new, friendly relationship between the religions, and joint work-projects. Although the open, sympathetic atmosphere now apparent is not measurable in any statistical sense, it is a prerequisite of all other forms of cooperation.

Interreligious dialogue does not center upon the creation of a climate of friendship, but cannot take place without it. Nor is its midpoint joint service to the world (though that may be seen as one of its necessary and valuable products); it is rather mutual understanding, which includes the recognition of religious values on both sides. This is an ecumenical goal, insofar as it brings people closer together and promotes the unity of the human race. But this ecumenism in the wide sense (something that must be stressed for clarity's sake) is different from the ecumenical movement within the Christian churches. Dialogue between the world religions does not aim at the organizational union of all existing religions in one universal religion. The syncretism implicit in any such desire is unattainable both for believing Christians and for members of other religious faiths.

Interreligious dialogue has to take into account the religious pluralism of the human race. The theological problems which arise in this connection are treated nowadays in the context of a "theology of religions." Perhaps it is sufficient to say here that we should bear in mind the liberating pronouncement of Vatican II about the possibilities of salvation in non-Christian religions, as well as that about religious freedom.

TRUTH FROM SUFFERING

The first of the "Four Noble Truths" proclaimed by Buddha after his enlightenment refers to the fundamental Buddhist experience of the suffering associated with human existence.

In its earliest version this tenet is expressed thus:

> *"This, O monks, is the noble truth of suffering: Birth is suffering; age is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; to be united with the unloved is suffering; to be separated from the loved one is suffering; not to achieve what one desires is suffering."*

In Buddhism this actual suffering is seen together with the undeniable instability of all things. Suffering is an inclusive concept which subsumes both physical suffering, such as pain, sickness, age and death, and their psychological concomitants, loneliness, fear and sadness, and the factors of instability, transience and restriction (which Christian philosophy comprises in the notion of contingency). Christian philosophy has made appropriate distinctions in this regard, but it has also acknowledged a kind of inner association of all painful aspects of human life, by recognizing the central significance of human sin. In Buddhist experience suffering (Pali: *dukkha*) is inseparably associated with instability (Pali: *anicca*). Human life is thoroughly permeated by suffering, for it is quite unstable in every respect.

Thus Buddha experienced human existence in his great enlightenment, when (as we must understand the old accounts) he perceived the nature of human life and experienced the fact of suffering in its negative and positive aspects. For the positive part of suffering is essential and may not be overlooked. There is an obvious connection between the *dukkha* experience of Sakyamuni in his great enlightenment and the encounter with the images of transience—an old man, a sick person, a burial and a monk—in the tale of the four excursions of Prince Siddhartha from his father's palace. Whether this incident was a legendary invention projected back into his youth, or a genuine experience, it prepared him for his enlightenment well before its actual occurrence. Later generations of Buddhists sought to induce the experience of transience with appropriate meditations. These are principally meditations upon the unbeautiful, the hateful and the impure, the so-called *asuba-bhavana,* used to make one aware of transience.

Obviously the basic Buddhist experience of suffering has to do with an existential experience which Christians also undergo, and which all people ultimately share: the experience that our human life is transient and therefore painful. We humans are not in the existential state we ought to be in, and wish to be in. Buddhism holds envy and ignorance mainly responsible for this state of things. These two links of the twelve-fold "chain of causation," those which produce bad *karma,* do not ultimately explain evil, but general human experience readily acknowledges them as factors which shed darkness on human life. Here Christianity seeks an explanation in sin and universal guilt, but neither

Buddhists nor Christians can offer a perfect, rational answer to the question why human existence is so full of suffering and instability. The world contains a *mysterium iniquitatis,* that mystery of evil, that dark fact, which human beings experience as suffering, transience and sin. When a person becomes authentically, profoundly and inwardly aware of this experience, it elicits in him or her a longing for a change of existence, for liberation, and – in religious terminology – for redemption. The fundamental experience of Buddhism sets it among the redemptive religions, which all in some way posit the need for salvation as a basic aspect of human life.

"ONE'S OWN BENEFIT – OTHERS' BENEFIT"

Buddhist scholasticism summed up its teaching in regard to benefit in the inclusive formula *atma-hitam—para-hitam,* which, literally translated, means: "One's own benefit—others' benefit." It saw this formula as fulfilled in the *Bodhisattva* ideal. As an enlightened being, the Bodhisattva possesses the highest degree of "own advantage," and at the same time dispenses benefits in merciful dedication to all living creatures.

The formula "own benefit—others' benefit" indicates the practical and pragmatic nature of Buddhist spirituality. In early Indian Buddhism the ideal of the "saint" (Sanskrit: *arhat*) is the precise aim of self-advantageous spirituality. By virtue of his exertions on his own behalf, the saint or holy man achieves a perfection which is free from all envy and from the cycle of rebirths, a perfection worthy of honor and respect. The spiritual exercises which conduce to this perfection are exhaustively described in the writings of the Pali canon. They constitute the well-known meditative and ascetic monastic spirituality which is still a vital part of the life of Theravada monasteries. The meritorious outward observation of rules ensures the practical benefit of this spirituality on a devotional level. It is a spirituality largely restricted to monks and nuns. Only a relatively small number of lay-people try to adapt themselves to this rigorous monastic asceticism. The great majority of the laity practise a popular form of Buddhism, and supplement their religious needs from the so-to-speak aboriginal cults which have been integrated into popular Buddhist religion in all Theravada countries.

"Others' benefit," the second part of the statement of purpose, is understood by Mahayana Buddhism in the universal sense which this branch proposes. Naturally one's own self is included in the desired condition of universal fulfilment in the state of becoming Buddha, which extends to all living creatures, or even to spiritual and material reality as a whole. To reach this goal one must perform numerous religious exercises, including the various stages of religious reflection. There is a practical intention behind many Mahayana exercises, such as prostration and burning incense before the image of the Buddha, the veneration of salvific Bodhisattvas, the recitation of sutras and the invocation of names, the celebration of the Bodhisattva vow and the penitential ritual, the performance of magi-

cal rites and the saying of mantric formulas. All these exercises are primarily practical, pragmatic actions from which benefits accrue. Even if the advantage aimed at is not directly material (for instance, healing the sick, bearing many children or obtaining an abundant harvest), the religious and spiritual benefit required is largely in this world. To a certain extent the same is true of the fruits of meditation. The psychological equilibrium sought for in meditation helps people in their earthly existence, and enlightenment is often prized for the ways in which it enriches life and expands consciousness, even though the experience obviously extends to the realm of the transcendent.

The supremely practical nature of Buddhist spirituality is important for Buddhist-Christian ecumenical encounter. Buddhists, whose own spiritual attitude relies on experience, look to their Christian discussion-partners for a tangible spiritual approach proven in the to-and-fro of everyday life. Of their very nature, religion and religious exercises have a pragmatic aspect; they are intended to help people. Even though utility is certainly not its essence, a religion ought to be beneficial. We remember Jesus's example of the good tree which brings forth good fruit. In our own days people have become very aware of the practical aspect of religion. There is much talk of service to humanity and of service to the world as fundamental to religions. Religions are socially and politically responsible and demand a new relevance. Experience has often given Buddhists a very good understanding of this outlook. If Christians were to put the second half of our Buddhist axiom, the advantage of others, in first place, Buddhists—who regard both parts important—would not find the Christian viewpoint odd. The two aspects, one's own benefit and the altruistic service of others, have to come together in the right way.

BUDDHIST COMPASSION AND CHRISTIAN LOVE

In Christianity love, and in Buddhism sympathetic suffering, extends beyond the ethical sphere. Buddhist sympathy is linked to the way of enlightenment and is characteristic of the Buddhist individual. Whenever Buddhism and Christianity as a topic has produced apologetical comparisons, fierce contention or attempts at mutual approximation, the relation between Buddhist compassion and Christian love has been at the center of interest. But, as with Nirvana, ideas on this immensely difficult theme have very soon proved divergent. In spite of a superficial similarity, often referred to, the impression of profound difference has prevailed. There has been more misunderstanding here than elsewhere.

Mere agreement about language, technical terms and their meanings is difficult to achieve. As often happens, semantic discrepancies reveal very different emotive reactions and spiritual accomplishments. Hence an initial modest attempt to clarify terminology is not uncalled for. The Indian languages Pali and Sanskrit contain two related but not equivalent terms, *metta* (Sanskrit: *maitri*) and *karuna*, which were used by early Buddhism. *Metta* belongs to the same linguistic group as *mitra*,

"friend," and means literally "friendliness." Other relevant translations are "goodness" and "kindness." *Karuna* is sympathy, fellow-feeling which feels and suffers on account of the suffering, and with the suffering, of the sufferer.

In addition Buddhism recognizes the Indian expressions *kama* for sensuous, erotic love or desire (in the same sense, *trshna* [Pali: *tanha*], literally "thirst," for example, in the twelve-fold chain of causes), and *bhakti* for trusting self-dedication. Hence the Buddhist vocabulary, though fairly rich, does not contain the word "love." We must remember, however, that this one word, which for us includes a totality of human feeling and intention, unites various currents of reference. It brings together, for instance, the notions of *eros, agape* and *philia* (Latin, *amor, caritas, dilectio*), which were decisive in western spirituality and reach back as far as Plato and Aristotle, having been enriched and given a Christian emphasis by Johannine and Pauline theology and the speculation of the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church. There is absolutely no equivalent in any Asiatic language for what we in the West include in the one word "love." When a quotation from the Buddhist literature in a European language uses the word "love" (or *amour, Liebe* and so on), we have to know the original term if we are to get at the correct meaning of the citation. The translation of a Buddhist text may be philologically correct and nevertheless mislead the reader, because the nature of the original word or phrase is obscured. Hence the concepts of a love which produces only suffering, and of a suffering which fails with love and with pleasure, have something to do with human love, but what is really meant is that sensuous, demanding love, *kama,* or thirst, *tanha,* which involves people in the cycle of rebirths; whereas *metta* and *karuna,* goodness and sympathetic suffering, belong to another sphere.

Given the state of the historical sources, we can know nothing certain about the life of the Buddha Sakyamuni, in matters of detail. But if we accept him as an historical figure (and there is much in favor of this, and nothing decisive against it), then we must accept him as he is effectively presented in the religion which he founded. In the consciousness of his community his enlightened wisdom is directly associated with his goodness and kindness, and with his unlimited mercifulness to all living things. This mercy is the decisive theme of his preaching. In order to help those involved in suffering, the one who had received the illumination of Buddahood showed them the way of salvation. His life reveals the compassionate basis of his character. Individual stories are probably legendary; that is the case, for instance, of his taming of the wild elephant Nalagiri by the power of his friendliness, or of his bringing of Roya of the Malla to follow him by the same persuasive power. Perhaps the story of his forgiving friendliness to his inimical cousin Devadatta is also a pious legend. At all events the Buddha lives in the memory of his adherents as the highest earthly embodiment of mercy. Buddhists therefore look on compassionate suffering as the principal virtue, because it is the virtue of the Buddha himself.

The doctrine of goodness *(metta)* is found in association with meditation in a particular text of the Pali canon, the so-called Metta Sutra, which has been compared to the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians. The blessing relating to goodness reads thus in the text:

May all beings be well and happy! May they live in security. May all beings, whether weak or strong, without exception, in high, middle and lower spheres of existence, small or great, visible or hidden, near or far, born or not yet born, be well and happy!

Happiness is to be ensured by the absence of any evil intention. The sutra continues:

No one should deceive or despise another, in whatever condition he may be. No one should wish evil upon another out of anger or bad will.

The moral tone of these final words is unmistakable. Then the text reaches its high-point:

Just as a mother defends her own child with her own life, so everyone should show a broad and unrestricted heart to all creatures!

What is recommended here is meditative action, as the following words make clear:

May he let goodness beam out over the whole world, above, below and roundabout, without restriction, without hatred and without enmity! Whether he stands, walks, sits, lies, he must always show concern. That is the best attitude in the world.

The Metta Sutra demands, as we have seen, the banishment of all ill-will, hatred, anger and malice. Even the golden rule is formulated negatively in Buddhist texts, for instance, in the Dhammapada in regard to the commandment not to kill: "In doing what you would have others do to you, neither kill nor cause killing!" Buddhists are convinced that human happiness in this world can prevail only with continuous and intensive concern for the removal of bad feeling, and especially all forms of hatred and enmity. Delay seems odd when the causes of so much human suffering are obvious. Though, with characteristic restraint, they prefer to describe goodness negatively, they show the way to positive, active goodness.

The great new achievement of Mahayana Buddhism, which is of such great importance for our theme, is the proclamation of the way of the Bodhisattva. Bodhisattva means literally "being of illumination," or "a creature directed towards enlightenment." Ultimately the word refers to the Buddha or Buddhas in pre-existences. That would seem to have been the earlier and original usage. The Bodhisattva ideal (there is no room here to go into the process of development) arose in the Mahayana schools. The Bodhisattva is understood as an enlightened being who, out of "great sympathetic fel-

low-feeling" *(mahakaruna)* forgoes entry into Nirvana in order to help all living creatures to win salvation from the painful cycle of rebirths. The association of "Great Wisdom" *(mahaprayna)* with "great sympathetic fellow-feeling" *(mahakaruna)* is characteristic of the Bodhisattva.

Confrontation of Buddhist friendliness or compassion with Christian love, like encounter between the two universal religions, has passed through various phases. At first apologetics was to the fore, and on the Christian side care was taken to define the main differences between the two approaches. Today dialogue looks for points of contact and means of understanding. Both approaches are justified and can serve the cause of mutual understanding.

Account must be taken first of the profound differences in the nature and motivation of the different attitudes of the two religions. Insofar as Christian love—because it is Christian—is essentially grounded in faith, it is a theological virtue through which the Christian lives his or her faith. Portrayed in the New Testament in the one commandment of love of God and of one's neighbor, it is personal love: love of God in answer to the personal love of the personal God, love of one's neighbor in personal encounter with one's neighbor, with one's fellow human being made in the image of God. In this theological perspective, there is no possibility of a confrontation of Christian love with Buddhist goodness or Buddhist compassion. Many Buddhists may be "anonymous Christians" in Karl Rahner's sense, but if they become explicit, reflective and credal Christians, they are no longer Buddhists. Similarly, with good reason, I think, we can find "anonymous Christian love" in many Buddhists—that is, spiritual traits which, in an unreflective and unthematic way, contain the essential core of Christian love. Yet it is impossible to start a dialogue from this point or to use it for conceptual explanations.

Buddhist-Christian dialogue is best advised to keep to the existential and practical side of things which is decisive in Buddhism. The existential sphere also has points of contact in regard to love and compassion. I am convinced that the actual attitudes of the faithful are often close to one another, if they reveal the concern for one's fellow humans which is established deep in the human heart. Of course this basic human feeling is articulated variously in each case. The Christian West sees the happy fulfilment of human existence as emanating from personal cooperation, from that I-Thou relationship in which the person forgets himself or herself in dedication to the other, in order to live in the "Thou." Approaches to personal relationship may also be discerned in Buddhism.

Buddhist compassion or sympathetic fellow-feeling is expressed concretely in Buddhist private and social life. I should like to concentrate on two typical Buddhist approaches which are especially enlivening in Buddhist-Christian dialogue at present: renunciation of force and tolerance.

Renunciation of force, or powerlessness *(ahimsa)*, comes from the Indian origins of Buddhism. I have already referred to the close connection of compassion with the first Buddhist commandment, the prohibition of killing. In ancient Indian ethics the sanctity of life plays the main role in the motivation of this commandment. From the beginning Buddhists have stressed the practical relevance of powerlessness to human happiness and peace. I should like to quote two famous ancient Buddhist texts—both with a pragmatic point:

May anger be overcome by friendliness, and evil by good! Victory breeds hatred, for the vanquished is unhappy. Hatred will never put paid to hatred in this world. Goodness abrogates hatred.

The other text comes from the Dhammapada:

"He rebuked me, he struck me, overcame me, robbed me." ... Such thoughts fester and their anger never rests. Anger in this world will never be stilled by anger. Peace is obtained by gentleness.

The Buddha is concerned to extirpate enmities completely, to establish peace and happiness on earth, and thus to benefit people truly—hence the pragmatic aspect. Buddhists perceive the model of this approach first in the historical Buddha, and in the Buddhist ruler Ashoka (third century B. C.) who, moved by the suffering of the vanquished after the taking of Kalinga, promised never again to have recourse to arms and—an exception among the powerful of this earth—maintained this oath of the renunciation of force right to the end. There is no need to stress the contemporary relevance of this manifestation of Buddhist compassion.

MEDITATION – PRAYER

Like Buddhist-Christian dialogue, Buddhist spirituality reaches its high point in meditation. Nowhere else are Buddhists so actively helpful, exemplary and merciful, and at no other point does the Westerner so readily learn from Buddhism as in the case of meditation. Nowadays the Asiatic modes of meditation are of great interest in the West, where they are eagerly explored. Knowledge of the part played in Buddhism by meditation is useful, even essential, for anyone using Buddhist methods of meditation.

In all branches of Buddhism, meditation is a natural component, indeed the core of Buddhist practice. Of course, there are various kinds of meditation in Buddhism and not all practices are of equal value. Though methods can be evaluated differently, that does not imply a similar judgment of the quality of the experience obtained with their assistance. A serious practitioner using a less appropriate method may achieve a more profound and valuable experience than another using a better method.

With some exaggeration, Buddhism as a whole may be seen as a kind of yoga. Of course that would mean forgetting essential aspects of the Buddhist salvific way. But it is true that the ancient Buddhist method of meditation, which continues in Theravada Buddhism, has adopted and integrated important elements from yoga, such as stance, breathing, and mortification of the senses,

ideas and mind; essentially it consists of exercises in concentration which rely above all on attentiveness (Pali: *sati*).

The goal of the method of meditation based on attention is the achievement of perception (Pali: *vipassana*), which is defined as "sudden intuitive knowledge of the transience, poverty and impersonality of all physical and spiritual existential phenomena." The Pali canon features in addition to this perception another way which relies on peace of heart (Pali: *samatha*). The "unfolding of peace of heart" *(samatha-bhavana)* occurs by means of the "unfolding of recollection" *(samadhi-bhavana);* it brings peace to the spirit through immersion in meditation so that the external world is wholly cancelled and even mental activities such as thinking are arrested. Perception and peace of heart are distinguished but not separated as different fruits of meditation in the Pali canon. Both feature an intuitive or ecstatic aspect which testifies to the attainment of a higher state of awareness.

Much could be said about the relations between meditation and prayer. Admittedly both are distinct in approach and goal, but they are not to be irremediably opposed to one another. Pluralistic dharma theory, which denies not only the empirical ego but the true self, contradicts fundamental Christian insights and experiences. Nevertheless we may discern certain associations. First inward concentration is also something to be striven for in Christian spirituality, which also has a place for exercises in concentration—though they have no content. Self-possession and self-control, achieved by concentration, are treated as beneficial by all religions.

Let us go a step further. Among the modes of meditation handed down in Theravada spirituality, there is an exercise which to some extent is almost halfway to Christian prayer. When I mentioned Buddhist goodness or friendliness (Pali: *metta*), I spoke of that form of blessing known in the Pali canon as *brahma-vihara,* in which the monk penetrates the universe in all four directions with the power of good, of compassion, of joy and equanimity, filled with the desire that all living things should be free from care, sickness and suffering, and that all may attain to the peace of Nirvana. The wish is not a petition, for it is not addressed to any higher being and thus differs essentially from Christian prayer, but it is worthy of note that he who makes his wish is certain that it will come to pass. The wish is meaningful for him. What basis is there for assurance of the wish? Surely if wishing is based on trust in an ultimately meaningful fulfilment of reality, we have here an approach to a form of transcendental experience, and Buddhist monks meditating in this way come close to a transcendent reality. If that is the case, then in ancient Buddhist meditation we can discern an approximation, however distant, to Christian prayer.

THE WESTERN VIEW OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Among Buddhist contributions to the religious heritage of mankind, meditation has found the most immediate response. Friedrich Heiler, who knew only a part of Buddhist meditational methods, contrasted "Buddha, the master of deep meditation" and "Jesus, the master of prayer." Meditation and

prayer are not mutually exclusive, but exist in a polar relationship to one another. These two peaks of religious practice can supplement and enrich one another. In this perspective, eastern meditation has had an important task in the West.

Through adoption all over the world Buddhist meditation has been secularized to a disturbing extent. This trend has reached a high point when eastern or Buddhist modes of meditation have been seen as equivalent or approximate to drug use.

In spite of all the differences, from a western viewpoint Buddhist forms of meditation have in common the fact that they aim not so much at the achievement of new insights and knowledge, as at attainment to mental states, degrees of concentration and modes of consciousness. They are concerned more with somato-psychic techniques than with the appropriation of spiritual contents. Here there is a profound difference from traditional Christian meditation, which is oriented to the Bible and to truths believed in as divine revelation. On account of the obvious distance from the western mentality, even after awareness of Buddhist doctrince in the West it took some time for Buddhist meditation to win more than scant attention. All this has changed considerably during the last few decades, so that the value of Buddhist methods is now widely recognized. Not only the findings of modern scientific psychology but the experiences of practitioners of Buddhist meditation have contributed to this change. But this new situation does not mean any removal of the difference between Buddhist and Christian meditation. The distinction remains. But it has been shown that serious involvement in Buddhist meditation can be of value and benefit to Westerners. Even Christian groups have used the Asiatic methods with success, and have begun a process of learning which can hardly be said to be concluded. Christian spirituality in the future will not be able to discard its ancient methods and will certainly continue to draw on them, but there is nothing to prevent Christians using Buddhist methods in addition, and especially Zen exercises.

THE RELIGIOUS PERSON ON THE WAY

The religious person on the way—even now we are talking symbolically—understands his or her situation in symbols which differ according to nation, culture and religion, which cross and intermingle, but accord with one another in certain fundamental, original aspects. In East and West alike the wanderer is *en route.* Another primitive symbol shows us that this way is like a transition, or a crossing from one coast or bank to another. Religious interest builds bridges. The many bridges of the Japanese Zen garden indicate a metaphysical, religious reality; they have a symbolic meaning and signify the crossing to the realm beyond. Westerners understand this symbolic language of the East; the Christian recognizes the symbol of the bridge and the other side, for he or she sees existence as a transition.

We can view the religious way only from this bank or coast. However we busy ourselves, we cannot

know what things look like from the other side. Yet what the religious person can learn from the viewpoint of this bank about his or her existential state, in order to win through to the desired shelter and security, obviously has to suffice. In this imperfect world only religion can offer that security, and offer it in our technological age which seeks to limit humanity unredeemed to this world. It is astonishing that in spite of all the dominant concern for this world, religious longing is now stronger than ever. Religious need leads many modern men and women, alienated from traditional religious communities, to grasp at substitutes. The reason for this is that human beings cannot do without security.

A Buddhist draws assurance from the symbolic knowledge of the two banks or two coasts. In everyday practice and by meditation the Buddhist attains to assurance of the inneffable. For the Christian, assurance and conviction are to be found essentially in faith in the word of God. The Christian possesses in faith an undoubted truth of the highest value. As Buddhist and Christian progress in religious practice through faith, challenge and meditation, they will discover further reason for and experience their assurance more profoundly.

In the symbol of bank and coast, and in that of crossing the swaying bridge, Buddhists and Christians experience the paradox of strength in weakness which is characteristic of the existential condition of the religious man or woman, and which also affects interreligious dialogue. In the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps the only vehicle of Christian teaching which has found complete acceptance in the religious East, we have an ideal of goodness and renunciation which stands for the highest form of human fulfilment. It is the ideal of strength in weakness, confirmed by the survival of the great religions despite all political setbacks, spiritual unheavals and world-shaking catastrophes.

Buddhist-Christian dialogue not only asks us to consider what is past, and to turn to history, but invites orientation to the future. It is one of the peculiar characteristics of our times that all religions have become increasingly aware of their responsibility for the future. At the same time it seems as if the religions have an ineluctable contribution to make in the formation of what is new, inasmuch as they both draw their sustenance from and point towards the ground of all things. Interreligious dialogue, then, is concerned with the future. It opens up the horizon of a new future. Perhaps, indeed, the possibility of all religious people talking to one another is one of the great hopes of humankind.

Heinrich Dumoulin, S.J.

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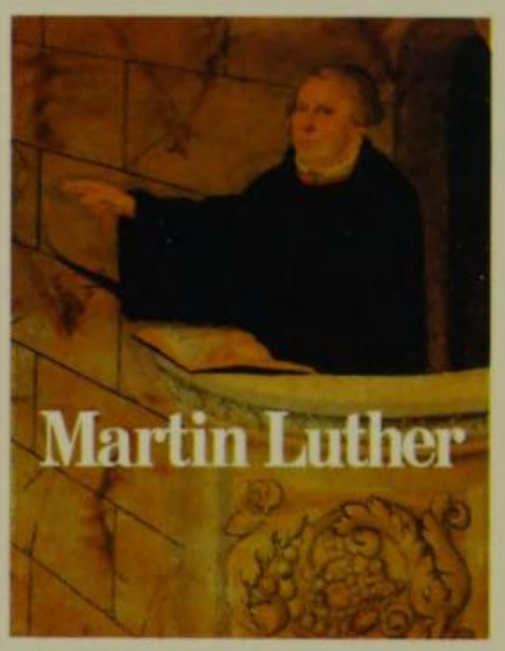

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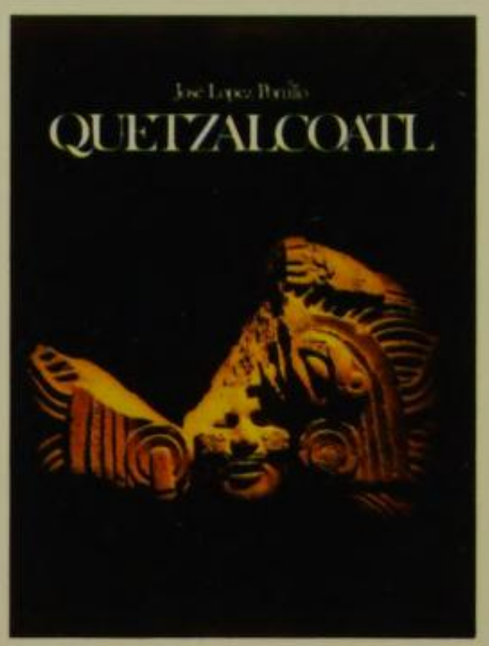

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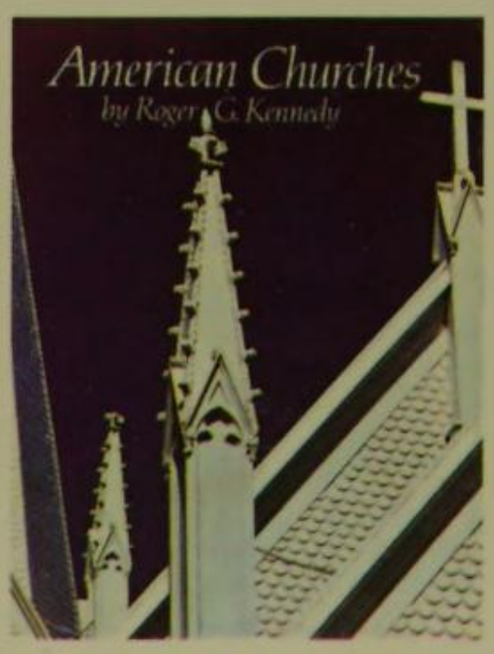

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